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TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

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TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

AND OTHER VERSES

B|P

BY

THOMAS HARDY

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
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1919

B1P

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PREFACE

In collecting the following poems I have to thank the editors and proprietors of the periodicals in which certain of them have appeared for permission to reclaim them.

Now that the miscellany is brought together, some lack of concord in pieces written at widely severed dates, and in contrasting moods and circumstances, will be obvious enough. This I cannot help, but the sense of disconnection, particularly in respect of those lyrics penned in the first person, will be immaterial when it is borne in mind that they are to be regarded, in the main, as dramatic monologues by different characters.

As a whole they will, I hope, take the reader forward, even if not far, rather than backward. I should add that some lines in the early-dated poems have been rewritten, though they have been left substantially unchanged.

T. H.

September 1909.

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TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

THE REVISITATION

As I lay awake at night-time
In an ancient country barrack known to ancient cannoneers,
And recalled the hopes that heralded each seeming brave and bright time
Of my primal purple years,

Much it haunted me that, nigh there,
I had borne my bitterest loss—when One who went, came not again ;
In a joyless hour of discord, in a joyless-hued July there—
A July just such as then.

And as thus I brooded longer,
With my faint eyes on the feeble square of wan-lit window frame,
A quick conviction sprung within me, grew, and grew yet stronger,
That the month-night was the same,

Too, as that which saw her leave me
On the rugged ridge of Waterstone, the peewits plaining round ;

And a lapsing twenty years had ruled that—
as it were to grieve me—
I should near the once-loved ground.

Though but now a war-worn stranger
Chance had quartered here, I rose up and
descended to the yard.
All was soundless, save the troopers' horses
tossing at the manger,
And the sentry keeping guard.

Through the gateway I betook me
Down the High Street and beyond the
lamps, across the battered bridge,
Till the country darkness clasped me and
the friendly shine forsook me,
And I bore towards the Ridge,

With a dim unowned emotion
Saying softly: "Small my reason, now at
midnight, to be here . . . .
Yet a sleepless swain of fifty with a brief
romantic notion
May retrace a track so dear."

Thus I walked with thoughts half-
uttered
Up the lane I knew so well, the grey, gaunt,
lonely Lane of Slyre;
And at whiles behind me, far at sea, a sullen
thunder muttered
As I mounted high and higher.

Till, the upper roadway quitting,
I adventured on the open drouthy downland thinly grassed,
While the spry white scuts of conies flashed before me, earthward flitting,
And an arid wind went past.

Round about me bulged the barrows
As before, in antique silence—immemorial funeral piles—
Where the sleek herds trampled daily the remains of flint-tipt arrows
Mid the thyme and chamomiles ;

And the Sarsen stone there, dateless,
On whose breast we had sat and told the zephyrs many a tender vow,
Held the heat of yester sun, as sank thereon one fated mateless
From those far fond hours till now.

Maybe flustered by my presence
Rose the peewits, just as all those years back, wailing soft and loud,
And revealing their pale pinions like a fitful phosphorescence
Up against the cope of cloud,

Where their dolesome exclamations
Seemed the voicings of the self-same throats
I had heard when life was green,

Though since that day uncounted frail forgotten generations
Of their kind had flecked the scene.—

And so, living long and longer
In a past that lived no more, my eyes discerned there, suddenly,
That a figure broke the skyline—first in vague contour, then stronger,
And was crossing near to me.

Some long-missed familiar gesture,
Something wonted, struck me in the figure's pause to list and heed,
Till I fancied from its handling of its loosely wrapping vesture
That it might be She indeed.

'Twas not reasonless : below there
In the vale, had been her home ; the nook might hold her even yet,
And the downlands were her father's fief ; she still might come and go there ;—
So I rose, and said, "Agnette!"

With a little leap, half-frightened,
She withdrew some steps ; then letting intuition smother fear
In a place so long-accustomed, and as one whom thought enlightened,
She replied : "What—*that* voice?—here!"

"Yes, Agnette!—And did the occasion
Of our marching hither make you think
I *might* walk where we two—"
"O, I often come," she murmured with
a moment's coy evasion,
"('Tis not far),—and—think of you."

Then I took her hand, and led her
To the ancient people's stone whereon I
had sat. There now sat we;
And together talked, until the first reluctant
shyness fled her,
And she spoke confidingly.

"It is *just* as ere we parted!"
Said she, brimming high with joy.—"And
when, then, came you here, and
why?"
"—Dear, I could not sleep for thinking of
our trystings when twin-hearted."
She responded, "Nor could I.

"There are few things I would rather
Than be wandering at this spirit-hour—lone-
lived, my kindred dead—
On this wold of well-known feature I inherit
from my father:
Night or day, I have no dread . . . .

"O I wonder, wonder whether
Any heartstring bore a signal-thrill between
us twain or no?—

Some such influence can, at times, they say,
draw severed souls together."
I said, "Dear, we'll dream it so."

Each one's hand the other's grasping,
And a mutual forgiveness won, we sank to
silent thought,
A large content in us that seemed our
rended lives reclasping,
And contracting years to nought.

Till I, maybe overweary
From the lateness, and a wayfaring so full
of strain and stress
For one no longer buoyant, to a peak so
steep and eery,
Sank to slow unconsciousness . . . .

How long I slept I knew not,
But the brief warm summer night had slid
when, to my swift surprise,
A red upedging sun, of glory chambered
mortals view not,
Was blazing on my eyes,

From the Milton Woods to Dole-Hill
All the spacious landscape lighting, and
around about my feet
Flinging tall thin tapering shadows from
the meanest mound and mole-hill,
And on trails the ewes had beat.

She was sitting still beside me,
Dozing likewise; and I turned to her, to
take her hanging hand;
When, the more regarding, that which like
a spectre shook and tried me
In her image then I scanned;

That which Time's transforming chisel
Had been tooling night and day for twenty
years, and tooled too well,
In its rendering of crease where curve was,
where was raven, grizzle—
Pits, where peonies once did dwell.

She had wakened, and perceiving
(I surmise) my sigh and shock, my quite
involuntary dismay,
Up she started, and—her wasted figure all
throughout it heaving—
Said, "Ah, yes: I am *thus* by day!

"Can you really wince and wonder
That the sunlight should reveal you such
a thing of skin and bone,
As if unaware a Death's-head must of need
lie not far under
Flesh whose years out-count your own?

"Yes: that movement was a warning
Of the worth of man's devotion!—Yes, Sir,
I am *old*," said she,

"And the thing which should increase love
turns it quickly into scorning—
And your new-won heart from me!"

Then she went, ere I could call her,
With the too proud temper ruling that had
parted us before,
And I saw her form descend the slopes, and
smaller grow and smaller,
Till I caught its course no more . . . .

True; I might have dogged her down-
ward;
—But it *may* be (though I know not) that
this trick on us of Time
Disconcerted and confused me. — Soon I
bent my footsteps townward,
Like to one who had watched a crime.

Well I knew my native weakness,
Well I know it still. I cherished her
reproach like physic-wine,
For I saw in that emaciate shape of bitterness
and bleakness
A nobler soul than mine.

Did I not return, then, ever?—
Did we meet again?—mend all?—Alas,
what greyhead perseveres!—
Soon I got the Route elsewhither.—Since
that hour I have seen her never:
Love is lame at fifty years.

A TRAMPWOMAN'S TRAGEDY

(182–)

I

From Wynyard's Gap the livelong day,
The livelong day,
We beat afoot the northward way
We had travelled times before.
The sun-blaze burning on our backs,
Our shoulders sticking to our packs,
By fosseway, fields, and turnpike tracks
We skirted sad Sedge-Moor.

II

Full twenty miles we jaunted on,
We jaunted on,—
My fancy-man, and jeering John,
And Mother Lee, and I.
And, as the sun drew down to west,
We climbed the toilsome Poldon crest,
And saw, of landskip sights the best,
The inn that beamed thereby.

III

For months we had padded side by side,
Ay, side by side
Through the Great Forest, Blackmoor wide,
And where the Parret ran.
We'd faced the gusts on Mendip ridge,
Had crossed the Yeo unhelped by bridge,
Been stung by every Marshwood midge,
I and my fancy-man.

IV

Lone inns we loved, my man and I,
My man and I;
"King's Stag," "Windwhistle" high and dry,
"The Horse" on Hintock Green,
The cozy house at Wynyard's Gap,
"The Hut" renowned on Bredy Knap,
And many another wayside tap
Where folk might sit unseen.

V

Now as we trudged—O deadly day,
O deadly day!—
I teased my fancy-man in play
And wanton idleness.
I walked alongside jeering John,
I laid his hand my waist upon;
I would not bend my glances on
My lover's dark distress.

VI

Thus Poldon top at last we won,
At last we won,
And gained the inn at sink of sun
Far-famed as "Marshal's Elm."
Beneath us figured tor and lea,
From Mendip to the western sea—
I doubt if finer sight there be
Within this royal realm.

VII

Inside the settle all a-row—
All four a-row
We sat, I next to John, to show
That he had wooed and won.
And then he took me on his knee,
And swore it was his turn to be
My favoured mate, and Mother Lee
Passed to my former one.

VIII

Then in a voice I had never heard,
I had never heard,
My only Love to me: "One word,
My lady, if you please!
Whose is the child you are like to bear?—
His? After all my months o' care?"
God knows 'twas not! But, O despair!
I nodded—still to tease.

IX

Then up he sprung, and with his knife---
And with his knife
He let out jeering Johnny's life,
Yes ; there, at set of sun.
The slant ray through the window nigh
Gilded John's blood and glazing eye,
Ere scarcely Mother Lee and I
Knew that the deed was done.

X

The taverns tell the gloomy tale,
The gloomy tale,
How that at Ivel-chester jail
My Love, my sweetheart swung ;
Though stained till now by no misdeed
Save one horse ta'en in time o' need ;
(Blue Jimmy stole right many a steed
Ere his last fling he flung.)

XI

Thereaft I walked the world alone,
Alone, alone !
On his death-day I gave my groan
And dropt his dead-born child.
'Twas nigh the jail, beneath a tree,
None tending me ; for Mother Lee
Had died at Glaston, leaving me
Unfriended on the wild.

XII

And in the night as I lay weak,
As I lay weak,
The leaves a-falling on my cheek,
The red moon low declined—
The ghost of him I'd die to kiss
Rose up and said: "Ah, tell me this!
Was the child mine, or was it his?
Speak, that I rest may find!"

XIII

O doubt not but I told him then,
I told him then,
That I had kept me from all men
Since we joined lips and swore.
Whereat he smiled, and thinned away
As the wind stirred to call up day . .
—'Tis past! And here alone I stray
Haunting the Western Moor.

NOTES.—"Windwhistle" (Stanza IV.). The highness and dryness of Windwhistle Inn was impressed upon the writer two or three years ago, when, after climbing on a hot afternoon to the beautiful spot near which it stands and entering the inn for tea, he was informed by the landlady that none could be had, unless he would fetch water from a valley half a mile off, the house containing not a drop, owing to its situation. However, a tantalizing row of full barrels behind her back testified to a wetness of a certain sort, which was not at that time desired.

"Marshal's Elm" (Stanza VI.) so picturesquely

situated, is no longer an inn, though the house, or part of it, still remains. It used to exhibit a fine old swinging sign.

"Blue Jimmy" (Stanza x.) was a notorious horse-stealer of Wessex in those days, who appropriated more than a hundred horses before he was caught, among others one belonging to a neighbour of the writer's grandfather. He was hanged at the now demolished Ivel-chester or Ilchester jail above mentioned—that building formerly of so many sinister associations in the minds of the local peasantry, and the continual haunt of fever, which at last led to its condemnation. Its site is now an innocent-looking green meadow.

April 1902.

THE TWO ROSALINDS

I

The dubious daylight ended,
And I walked the Town alone, unminding
whither bound and why,
As from each gaunt street and gaping square
a mist of light ascended
And dispersed upon the sky.

II

Files of evanescent faces
Passed each other without heeding, in their
travail, teen, or joy,
Some in void unvisioned listlessness in-
wrought with pallid traces
Of keen penury's annoy.

III

Nebulous flames in crystal cages
Leered as if with discontent at city move-
ment, murk, and grime,

And as waiting some procession of great
ghosts from bygone ages
To exalt the ignoble time.

IV

In a colonnade high-lighted,
By a thoroughfare where stern utilitarian
traffic dinned,
On a red and white emblazonment of players
and parts, I sighted
The name of "Rosalind,"

V

And her famous mates of "Arden,"
Who observed no stricter customs than "the
seasons' difference" bade,
Who lived with running brooks for books
in Nature's wildwood garden,
And called idleness their trade . . . .

VI

Now the poster stirred an ember
Still remaining from my ardours of some
forty years before,
When the selfsame portal on an eve it
thrilled me to remember
A like announcement bore;

VII

And expectantly I had entered,
And had first beheld in human mould a
Rosalind woo and plead,
On whose transcendent figuring my speedy
soul had centred
As it had been she indeed . . . .

VIII

So ; all other plans discarding,
I resolved on entrance, bent on seeing what
I once had seen,
And approached the gangway of my earlier
knowledge, disregarding
The tract of time between.

IX

" The words, sir ? " cried a creature
Hovering mid the shine and shade as 'twixt
the live world and the tomb ;
But the well-known numbers needed not
for me a text or teacher
To revive and re-illume.

X

Then the play. . . . . But how unfitted
Was *this* Rosalind !—a mammet quite to
me, in memories nurst,

And with chilling disappointment soon I
sought the street I had quitted,
To re-ponder on the first.

XI

The hag still hawked,—I met her
Just without the colonnade. "So you don't
like her, sir?" said she.
"Ah—*I* was once that Rosalind!—I acted
her—none better—
Yes—in eighteen sixty-three.

XII

"Thus I won Orlando to me
In my then triumphant days when I had
charm and maidenhood,
Now some forty years ago.—I used to say,
Come woo me, woo me!"
And she struck the attitude.

XIII

It was when I had gone there nightly;
And the voice—though raucous now—was
yet the old one.—Clear as noon
My Rosalind was here . . . . Thereon the
band withinside lightly
Beat up a merry tune.

A SUNDAY MORNING TRAGEDY

(*circa* 186–)

I BORE a daughter flower-fair,
In Pydel Vale, alas for me;
I joyed to mother one so rare,
But dead and gone I now would be.

Men looked and loved her as she grew,
And she was won, alas for me;
She told me nothing, but I knew,
And saw that sorrow was to be.

I knew that one had made her thrall,
A thrall to him, alas for me;
And then, at last, she told me all,
And wondered what her end would be.

She owned that she had loved too well,
Had loved too well, unhappy she,
And bore a secret time would tell,
Though in her shroud she'd sooner be.

I plodded to her sweetheart's door
In Pydel Vale, alas for me :
I pleaded with him, pleaded sore,
To save her from her misery.

He frowned, and swore he could not wed,
Seven times he swore it could not be ;
"Poverty's worse than shame," he said,
Till all my hope went out of me.

"I've packed my traps to sail the main"—
Roughly he spake, alas did he—
"Wessex beholds me not again,
'Tis worse than any jail would be!"

—There was a shepherd whom I knew,
A subtle man, alas for me :
I sought him all the pastures through,
Though better I had ceased to be.

I traced him by his lantern light,
And gave him hint, alas for me,
Of how she found her in the plight
That is so scorned in Christendie.

"Is there an herb. . . . ?" I asked. "Or none?"
Yes, thus I asked him desperately.
"—There is," he said ; "a certain one. . . ."
Would he had sworn that none knew he!

"To-morrow I will walk your way,"
He hinted low, alas for me.—
Fieldwards I gazed throughout next day;
Now fields I never more would see!

The sunset-shine, as curfew strook,
As curfew strook beyond the lea,
Lit his white smock and gleaming crook,
While slowly he drew near to me.

He pulled from underneath his smock
The herb I sought, my curse to be—
"At times I use it in my flock,"
He said, and hope waxed strong in me.

"'Tis meant to balk ill-motherings"—
(Ill-motherings! Why should they be?)—
"If not, would God have sent such things?"
So spoke the shepherd unto me.

That night I watched the poppling brew,
With bended back and hand on knee:
I stirred it till the dawnlight grew,
And the wind whiffled wailfully.

"This scandal shall be slain," said I,
"That lours upon her innocency:
I'll give all whispering tongues the lie;"—
But worse than whispers was to be.

"Here's physic for untimely fruit,"
I said to her, alas for me,
Early that morn in fond salute;
And in my grave I now would be.

—Next Sunday came, with sweet church chimes
In Pydel Vale, alas for me:
I went into her room betimes;
No more may such a Sunday be!

"Mother, instead of rescue nigh,"
She faintly breathed, alas for me,
"I feel as I were like to die,
And underground soon, soon should be."

From church that noon the people walked
In twos and threes, alas for me,
Showed their new raiment — smiled and talked,
Though sackcloth-clad I longed to be.

Came to my door her lover's friends,
And cheerly cried, alas for me,
"Right glad are we he makes amends,
For never a sweeter bride can be."

My mouth dried, as 'twere scorched within,
Dried at their words, alas for me:
More and more neighbours crowded in,
(O why should mothers ever be!)

"Ha-ha! Such well-kept news!" laughed
they,
Yes—so they laughed, alas for me.
"Whose banns were called in church to-
day?"—
Christ, how I wished my soul could flee!

"Where is she? O the stealthy miss,"
Still bantered they, alas for me,
"To keep a wedding close as this . . . ."
Ay, Fortune worked thus wantonly!

"But you are pale—you did not know?"
They archly asked, alas for me,
I stammered, "Yes—some days—ago,"
While coffined clay I wished to be.

"'Twas done to please her, we surmise?"
(They spoke quite lightly in their glee)
"Done by him as a fond surprise?"
I thought their words would madden me.

Her lover entered. "Where's my bird?—
My bird—my flower—my picotee?
First time of asking, soon the third!"
Ah, in my grave I well may be.

To me he whispered: "Since your call—"
So spoke he then, alas for me—
"I've felt for her, and righted all."
—I think of it to agony.

"She's faint to-day—tired—nothing more—"
Thus did I lie, alas for me. . . .
I called her at her chamber door
As one who scarce had strength to be.

No voice replied. I went within—
O women! scourged the worst are we. . . .
I shrieked. The others hastened in
And saw the stroke there dealt on me.

There she lay—silent, breathless, dead,
Stone dead she lay—wronged, sinless she!—
Ghost-white the cheeks once rosy-red:
Death had took her. Death took not me.

I kissed her colding face and hair,
I kissed her corpse—the bride to be!—
My punishment I cannot bear,
But pray God *not* to pity me.

January 1904.

THE HOUSE OF HOSPITALITIES

HERE we broached the Christmas barrel,
Pushed up the charred log-ends ;
Here we sang the Christmas carol,
And called in friends.

Time has tired me since we met here
When the folk now dead were young,
Since the viands were outset here
And quaint songs sung.

And the worm has bored the viol
That used to lead the tune,
Rust eaten out the dial
That struck night's noon.

Now no Christmas brings in neighbours,
And the New Year comes unlit ;
Where we sang the mole now labours,
And spiders knit.

Yet at midnight if here walking,
When the moon sheets wall and tree,
I see forms of old time talking,
Who smile on me.

BEREFT

In the black winter morning
No light will be struck near my eyes
While the clock in the stairway is warning
For five, when he used to rise.
Leave the door unbarred,
The clock unwound,
Make my lone bed hard—
Would 'twere underground!

When the summer dawns clearly,
And the appletree-tops seem alight,
Who will undraw the curtain and cheerly
Call out that the morning is bright?

When I tarry at market
No form will cross Durnover Lea
In the gathering darkness, to hark at
Grey's Bridge for the pit-pat o' me.

When the supper crock's steaming,
And the time is the time of his tread,

I shall sit by the fire and wait dreaming
In a silence as of the dead.
Leave the door unbarred,
The clock unwound,
Make my lone bed hard—
Would 'twere underground!

1901.

JOHN AND JANE

I

He sees the world as a boisterous place
Where all things bear a laughing face,
And humorous scenes go hourly on,
  Does John.

II

They find the world a pleasant place
Where all is ecstasy and grace,
Where a light has risen that cannot wane,
  Do John and Jane.

III

They see as a palace their cottage-place,
Containing a pearl of the human race,
A hero, maybe, hereafter styled,
  Do John and Jane with a baby-child.

IV

They rate the world as a gruesome place,
Where fair looks fade to a skull's grimace,—
As a pilgrimage they would fain get done—
  Do John and Jane with their worthless son.

THE CURATE'S KINDNESS

A WORKHOUSE IRONY

I

I THOUGHT they'd be strangers aroun' me,
But she's to be there!
Let me jump out o' waggon and go back
and drown me
At Pummery or Ten-Hatches Weir.

II

I thought: "Well, I've come to the Union—
The workhouse at last—
After honest hard work all the week, and
Communion
O' Zundays, these fifty years past.

III

"'Tis hard; but," I thought, "never mind it:
There's gain in the end:
And when I get used to the place I shall find
it
A home, and may find there a friend.

IV

"Life there will be better than t'other,
For peace is assured.
The men in one wing and their wives in another
Is strictly the rule of the Board."

V

Just then one young Pa'son arriving
Steps up out of breath
To the side o' the waggon wherein we were driving
To Union; and calls out and saith:

VI

"Old folks, that harsh order is altered,
Be not sick of heart!
The Guardians they poohed and they pished and they paltered
When urged not to keep you apart.

VII

"'It is wrong,' I maintained, 'to divide them,
Near forty years wed.'
'Very well, sir. We promise, then, they shall abide them
In one wing together,' they said."

VIII

Then I sank—knew 'twas quite a foredone thing
That misery should be
To the end! . . . To get freed of her there was the one thing
Had made the change welcome to me.

IX

To go there was ending but badly;
'Twas shame and 'twas pain;
"But anyhow," thought I, "thereby I shall gladly
Get free of this forty years' chain."

X

I thought they'd be strangers aroun' me,
But she's to be there!
Let me jump out o' waggon and go back and drown me
At Pummery or Ten-Hatches Weir.

THE FLIRT'S TRAGEDY

(17—)

HERE alone by the logs in my chamber,
Deserted, decrepit—
Spent flames limning ghosts on the wainscot
Of friends I once knew—

My drama and hers begins weirdly
Its dumb re-enactment,
Each scene, sigh, and circumstance passing
In spectral review.

—Wealth was mine beyond wish when I met her—
The pride of the lowland—
Embowered in Tintinhull Valley
By laurel and yew;

And love lit my soul, notwithstanding
My features' ill favour,
Too obvious beside her perfections
Of line and of hue.

But it pleased her to play on my passion,
And whet me to pleadings
That won from her mirthful negations
And scornings undue.

Then I fled her disdains and derisions
To cities of pleasure,
And made me the crony of idlers
In every purlieu.

Of those who lent ear to my story,
A needy Adonis
Gave hint how to grizzle her garden
From roses to rue,

Could his price but be paid for so purging
My scorner of scornings:
Thus tempted, the lust to avenge me
Germed inly and grew.

I clothed him in sumptuous apparel,
Consigned to him coursers,
Meet equipage, liveried attendants
In full retinue.

So dowered, with letters of credit
He wayfared to England,
And spied out the manor she goddessed,
And handy thereto,

Set to hire him a tenantless mansion
As coign-stone of vantage
For testing what gross adulation
Of beauty could do.

He laboured through mornings and evens,
On new moons and sabbaths,
By wiles to enmesh her attention
In park, path, and pew ;

And having afar played upon her,
Advanced his lines nearer,
And boldly outleaping conventions,
Bent briskly to woo.

His gay godlike face, his rare seeming
Anon worked to win her,
And later, at noontides and night-tides
They held rendezvous.

His tarriance full spent, he departed
And met me in Venice,
And lines from her told that my jilter
Was stooping to sue.

Not long could be further concealment,
She pled to him humbly :
"By our love and our sin, O protect me ;
I fly unto you ! "

A mighty remorse overgat me,
I heard her low anguish,
And there in the gloom of the *calle*
My steel ran him through.

A swift push engulphed his hot carrion
Within the canal there—
That still street of waters dividing
The city in two.

—I wandered awhile all unable
To smother my torment,
My brain racked by yells as from Tophet
Of Satan's whole crew.

A month of unrest brought me hovering
At home in her precincts,
To whose hiding-hole local story
Afforded a clue.

Exposed, and expelled by her people,
Afar off in London
I found her alone, in a sombre
And soul-stifling mew.

Still burning to make reparation
I pleaded to wive her,
And father her child, and thus faintly
My mischief undo.

She yielded, and spells of calm weather
Succeeded the tempest;
And one sprung of him stood as scion
Of my bone and thew. . . .

But Time unveils sorrows and secrets,
And so it befell now:
By inches the curtain was twitched at,
And slowly undrew.

As we lay, she and I, in the night-time,
We heard the boy moaning:
"O misery mine! My false father
Has murdered my true!"

She gasped: yea, she heard; understood it.
Next day the child fled us;
And nevermore sighted was even
A print of his shoe.

Thenceforward she shunned me, and languished;
Till one day the park-pool
Embraced her fair form, and extinguished
Her eyes' living blue.

—So; ask not what blast may account for
This aspect of pallor,
These bones that just prison within them
Life's poor residue;

But pass by, and leave unregarded
A Cain to his suffering,
For vengeance too dark on the woman
Whose lover he slew.

THE REJECTED MEMBER'S WIFE

We shall see her no more
On the balcony,
Smiling, while hurt, at the roar
As of surging sea
From the stormy sturdy band
Who have doomed her lord's cause,
Though she waves her little hand
As it were applause.

Here will be candidates yet,
And candidates' wives,
Fervid with zeal to set
Their ideals on our lives:
Here will come market-men
On the market-days,
Here will clash now and then
More such party assays.

And the balcony will fill
When such times are renewed,
And the throng in the street will thrill
With to-day's mettled mood;

But she will no more stand
In the sunshine there,
With that wave of her white-gloved hand,
And that chestnut hair.

January 1906.

THE FARM-WOMAN'S WINTER

I

If seasons all were summers,
And leaves would never fall,
And hopping casement-comers
Were foodless not at all,
And fragile folk might be here
That white winds bid depart;
Then one I used to see here
Would warm my wasted heart!

II

One frail, who, bravely tilling
Long hours in gripping gusts,
Was mastered by their chilling,
And now his ploughshare rusts.
So savage winter catches
The breath of limber things,
And what I love he snatches,
And what I love not, brings.

AUTUMN IN KING'S HINTOCK PARK

HERE by the baring bough
Raking up leaves,
Often I ponder how
Springtime deceives,—
I, an old woman now,
Raking up leaves.

Here in the avenue
Raking up leaves,
Lords' ladies pass in view,
Until one heaves
Sighs at life's russet hue,
Raking up leaves!

Just as my shape you see
Raking up leaves,
I saw, when fresh and free,
Those memory weaves
Into grey ghosts by me,
Raking up leaves.

Yet, Dear, though one may sigh,
  Raking up leaves,
New leaves will dance on high—
  Earth never grieves !—
Will not, when missed am I
  Raking up leaves.

1901.

SHUT OUT THAT MOON

Close up the casement, draw the blind,
Shut out that stealing moon,
She wears too much the guise she wore
Before our lutes were strewn
With years-deep dust, and names we read
On a white stone were hewn.

Step not out on the dew-dashed lawn
To view the Lady's Chair,
Immense Orion's glittering form,
The Less and Greater Bear :
Stay in ; to such sights we were drawn
When faded ones were fair.

Brush not the bough for midnight scents
That come forth lingeringly,
And wake the same sweet sentiments
They breathed to you and me
When living seemed a laugh, and love
All it was said to be.

Within the common lamp-lit room
Prison my eyes and thought ;
Let dingy details crudely loom,
Mechanic speech be wrought :
Too fragrant was Life's early bloom,
Too tart the fruit it brought !

1904.

REMINISCENCES OF A DANCING MAN

I

Who now remembers Almack's balls—
Willis's sometime named—
In those two smooth-floored upper halls
For faded ones so famed?
Where as we trod to trilling sound
The fancied phantoms stood around,
Or joined us in the maze,
Of the powdered Dears from Georgian years,
Whose dust lay in sightless sealed-up biers,
The fairest of former days.

II

Who now remembers gay Cremorne,
And all its jaunty jills,
And those wild whirling figures born
Of Jullien's grand quadrilles?
With hats on head and morning coats
There footed to his prancing notes

Our partner-girls and we ;
And the gas-jets winked, and the lustres
clinked,
And the platform throbbed as with arms
enlinked
We moved to the minstrelsy.

III

Who now recalls those crowded rooms
Of old yclept "The Argyle,"
Where to the deep Drum-polka's booms
We hopped in standard style?
Whither have danced those damsels now!
Is Death the partner who doth moue
Their wormy chaps and bare?
Do their spectres spin like sparks within
The smoky halls of the Prince of Sin
To a thunderous Jullien air?

THE DEAD MAN WALKING

They hail me as one living,
But don't they know
That I have died of late years,
Untombed although ?

I am but a shape that stands here,
A pulseless mould,
A pale past picture, screening
Ashes gone cold.

Not at a minute's warning,
Not in a loud hour,
For me ceased Time's enchantments
In hall and bower.

There was no tragic transit,
No catch of breath,
When silent seasons inched me
On to this death. . . .

—A Troubadour-youth I rambled
With Life for lyre,
The beats of being raging
In me like fire.

But when I practised eyeing
The goal of men,
It iced me, and I perished
A little then.

When passed my friend, my kinsfolk
Through the Last Door,
And left me standing bleakly,
I died yet more;

And when my Love's heart kindled
In hate of me,
Wherefore I knew not, died I
One more degree.

And if when I died fully
I cannot say,
And changed into the corpse-thing
I am to-day;

Yet is it that, though whiling
The time somehow
In walking, talking, smiling,
I live not now.

MORE LOVE LYRICS

47716

1967

In five-score summers! All new eyes,
New minds, new modes, new fools, new wise;
New woes to weep, new joys to prize;

With nothing left of me and you
In that live century's vivid view
Beyond a pinch of dust or two;

A century which, if not sublime,
Will show, I doubt not, at its prime,
A scope above this blinkered time.

—Yet what to me how far above?
For I would only ask thereof
That thy worm should be my worm, Love!

16 Westbourne Park Villas, 1867.

HER DEFINITION

I LINGERED through the night to break of day,
Nor once did sleep extend a wing to me,
Intently busied with a vast array
Of epithets that should outfigure thee.

Full-featured terms — all fitless — hastened by,
And this sole speech remained: "That maiden mine!"—
Debarred from due description then did I
Perceive the indefinite phrase could yet define.

As common chests encasing wares of price
Are borne with tenderness through halls of state,
For what they cover, so the poor device
Of homely wording I could tolerate,
Knowing its unadornment held as freight
The sweetest image outside Paradise.

W. P. V.,
Summer: 1866.

THE DIVISION

RAIN on the windows, creaking doors,
With blasts that besom the green,
And I am here, and you are there,
And a hundred miles between!

O were it but the weather, Dear,
O were it but the miles
That summed up all our severance,
There might be room for smiles.

But that thwart thing betwixt us twain,
Which nothing cleaves or clears,
Is more than distance, Dear, or rain,
And longer than the years!

189-.

ON THE DEPARTURE PLATFORM

We kissed at the barrier; and passing through
She left me, and moment by moment got
Smaller and smaller, until to my view
She was but a spot;

A wee white spot of muslin fluff
That down the diminishing platform bore
Through hustling crowds of gentle and rough
To the carriage door.

Under the lamplight's fitful glowers,
Behind dark groups from far and near,
Whose interests were apart from ours,
She would disappear,

Then show again, till I ceased to see
That flexible form, that nebulous white;
And she who was more than my life to me
Had vanished quite. . . .

We have penned new plans since that fair
fond day,
And in season she will appear again—
Perhaps in the same soft white array—
But never as then!

—"And why, young man, must eternally fly
A joy you'll repeat, if you love her well?"
—O friend, nought happens twice thus; why,
I cannot tell!

IN A CATHEDRAL CITY

These people have not heard your name;
No loungers in this placid place
Have helped to bruit your beauty's fame.

The grey Cathedral, towards whose face
Bend eyes untold, has met not yours;
Your shade has never swept its base,

Your form has never darked its doors,
Nor have your faultless feet once thrown
A pensive pit-pat on its floors.

Along the street to maids well known
Blithe lovers hum their tender airs,
But in your praise voice not a tone. . . .

—Since nought bespeaks you here, or bears,
As I, your imprint through and through,
Here might I rest, till my heart shares
The spot's unconsciousness of you!

Salisbury.

"I SAY I'LL SEEK HER"

I SAY, "I'll seek her side
Ere hindrance interposes;"
But eve in midnight closes,
And here I still abide.

When darkness wears I see
Her sad eyes in a vision;
They ask, "What indecision
Detains you, Love, from me?—

"The creaking hinge is oiled,
I have unbarred the backway,
But you tread not the trackway;
And shall the thing be spoiled?

"Far cockcrows echo shrill,
The shadows are abating,
And I am waiting, waiting;
But O, you tarry still!"

HER FATHER

I MET her, as we had privily planned,
Where passing feet beat busily :
She whispered : "Father is at hand!
He wished to walk with me."

His presence as he joined us there
Banished our words of warmth away ;
We felt, with cloudings of despair,
What Love must lose that day.

Her crimson lips remained unkissed,
Our fingers kept no tender hold,
His lack of feeling made the tryst
Embarrassed, stiff, and cold.

A cynic ghost then rose and said,
"But is his love for her so small
That, nigh to yours, it may be read
As of no worth at all?

"You love her for her pink and white ;
But what when their fresh splendours close?
His love will last her in despite
Of Time, and wrack, and foes."

WEYMOUTH.

AT WAKING

When night was lifting,
And dawn had crept under its shade,
Amid cold clouds drifting
Dead-white as a corpse outlaid,
With a sudden scare
I seemed to behold
My Love in bare
Hard lines unfold.

Yea, in a moment,
An insight that would not die
Killed her old endowment
Of charm that had capped all nigh,
Which vanished to none
Like the gilt of a cloud,
And showed her but one
Of the common crowd.

She seemed but a sample
Of earth's poor average kind,
Lit up by no ample
Enrichments of mien or mind.

I covered my eyes
As to cover the thought,
And unrecognize
What the morn had taught.

O vision appalling
When the one believed-in thing
Is seen falling, falling,
With all to which hope can cling.
Off: it is not true;
For it cannot be
That the prize I drew
Is a blank to me!

WEYMOUTH, 1869.

FOUR FOOTPRINTS

HERE are the tracks upon the sand
Where stood last evening she and I—
Pressed heart to heart and hand to hand;
The morning sun has baked them dry.

I kissed her wet face—wet with rain,
For arid grief had burnt up tears,
While reached us as in sleeping pain
The distant gurgling of the weirs.

"I have married him—yes; feel that ring;
'Tis a week ago that he put it on. . . .
A dutiful daughter does this thing,
And resignation succeeds anon!

"But that I body and soul was yours
Ere he'd possession, he'll never know.
He's a confident man. 'The husband scores,'
He says, 'in the long run' . . . Now, Dear, go!"

I went. And to-day I pass the spot ;
It is only a smart the more to endure ;
And she whom I held is as though she were not,
For they have resumed their honeymoon tour.

IN THE VAULTED WAY

In the vaulted way, where the passage turned
To the shadowy corner that none could see,
You paused to part from me,—plaintively ;
Though overnight had come words that burned
My fond frail happiness out of me.

And then I kissed you,—despite my thought
That our spell must end when reflection came
On what you had deemed me, whose one long aim
Had been to serve you ; that what I sought
Lay not in a heart that could breathe such blame.

But yet I kissed you ; whereon you again
As of old kissed me. Why, why was it so?
Do you cleave to me after that light-tongued blow?
If you scorned me at eventide, how love then?
The thing is dark, Dear. I do not know.

THE PHANTOM

That was once her casement,
  And the taper nigh,
Shining from within there
  Beckoned, "Here am I!"

Now, as then, I see her
  Moving at the pane;
Ah; 'tis but her phantom
  Borne within my brain!—

Foremost in my vision
  Everywhere goes she;
Change dissolves the landscapes,
  She abides with me.

Shape so sweet and shy, Dear,
  Who can say thee nay?
Never once do I, Dear,
  Wish thy ghost away.

THE END OF THE EPISODE

INDULGE no more may we
In this sweet-bitter pastime :
The love-light shines the last time
Between you, Sweet, and me.

There shall remain no trace
Of what so closely tied us,
And blank as ere love eyed us
Will be our meeting-place.

The flowers and thymy air,
Will they now miss our coming ?
The dumbles thin their humming
To find we haunt not there ?

Though fervent was our vow,
Though ruddily ran our pleasure,
Bliss has fulfilled its measure,
And sees its sentence now.

Ache deep ; but make no moans :
Smile out ; but stilly suffer :
The paths of love are rougher
Than thoroughfares of stones.

THE SIGH

Little head against my shoulder,
Shy at first, then somewhat bolder,
And up-eyed ;
Till she, with a timid quaver,
Yielded to the kiss I gave her ;
But, she sighed.

That there mingled with her feeling
Some sad thought she was concealing
It implied.
—Not that she had ceased to love me,
None on earth she set above me ;
But she sighed.

She could not disguise a passion,
Dread, or doubt, in weakest fashion
If she tried :
Nothing seemed to hold us sundered,
Hearts were victors ; so I wondered
Why she sighed.

Afterwards I knew her throughly,
And she loved me staunchly, truly,
Till she died;
But she never made confession
Why, at that first sweet concession,
She had sighed.

It was in our May, remember;
And though now I near November,
And abide
Till my appointed change, unfretting,
Sometimes I sit half regretting
That she sighed.

"IN THE NIGHT SHE CAME"

I TOLD her when I left one day
That whatsoever weight of care
Might strain our love, Time's mere assault
Would work no changes there.
And in the night she came to me,
Toothless, and wan, and old,
With leaden concaves round her eyes,
And wrinkles manifold.

I tremblingly exclaimed to her,
"O wherefore do you ghost me thus!
I have said that dull defacing Time
Will bring no dreads to us."
"And is that true of *you*?" she cried
In voice of troubled tune.
I faltered: "Well . . . I did not think
You would test me quite so soon!"

She vanished with a curious smile,
Which told me, plainlier than by word,
That my staunch pledge could scarce beguile
The fear she had averred.

Her doubts then wrought their shape in me,
And when next day I paid
My due caress, we seemed to be
Divided by some shade.

THE CONFORMERS

Yes ; we'll wed, my little fay,
And you shall write you mine,
And in a villa chastely gray
We'll house, and sleep, and dine.
But those night-screened, divine,
Stolen trysts of heretofore,
We of choice ecstasies and fine
Shall know no more.

The formal faced cohue
Will then no more upbraid
With smiting smiles and whisperings two
Who have thrown less loves in shade.
We shall no more evade
The searching light of the sun,
Our game of passion will be played,
Our dreaming done.

We shall not go in stealth
To rendezvous unknown,
But friends will ask me of your health,
And you about my own.

When we abide alone,
No leapings each to each,
But syllables in frigid tone
Of household speech.

When down to dust we glide
Men will not say askance,
As now : "How all the country side
Rings with their mad romance!"
But as they graveward glance
Remark : "In them we lose
A worthy pair, who helped advance
Sound parish views."

THE DAWN AFTER THE DANCE

HERE is your parents' dwelling with its curtained windows telling
Of no thought of us within it or of our arrival here ;
Their slumbers have been normal after one day more of formal
Matrimonial commonplace and household life's mechanic gear.

I would be candid willingly, but dawn draws on so chillingly
As to render further cheerlessness intolerable now,
So I will not stand endeavouring to declare a day for severing,
But will clasp you just as always—just the olden love avow.

Through serene and surly weather we have walked the ways together,
And this long night's dance this year's end eve now finishes the spell ;

Yet we dreamt us but beginning a sweet
sempiternal spinning
Of a cord we have spun to breaking—too
intemperately, too well.

Yes; last night we danced I know, Dear, as
we did that year ago, Dear,
When a new strange bond between our days
was formed, and felt, and heard;
Would that dancing were the worst thing
from the latest to the first thing
That the faded year can charge us with; but
what avails a word!

That which makes man's love the lighter and
the woman's burn no brighter
Came to pass with us inevitably while slipped
the shortening year. . . .
And there stands your father's dwelling with
its blind bleak windows telling
That the vows of man and maid are frail
as filmy gossamere.

WEYMOUTH, 1869.

THE SUN ON THE LETTER

I DREW the letter out, while gleamed
The sloping sun from under a roof
Of cloud whose verge rose visibly.

The burning ball flung rays that seemed
Stretched like a warp without a woof
Across the levels of the lea

To where I stood, and where they beamed
As brightly on the page of proof
That she had shown her false to me

As if it had shown her true—had teemed
With passionate thought for my behoof
Expressed with their own ardency!

THE NIGHT OF THE DANCE

The cold moon hangs to the sky by its horn,
And centres its gaze on me ;
The stars, like eyes in reverie,
Their westering as for a while forborne,
Quiz downward curiously.

Old Robert draws the backbrand in,
The green logs steam and spit ;
The half-awakened sparrows flit
From the riddled thatch ; and owls begin
To whoo from the gable-slit.

Yes ; far and nigh things seem to know
Sweet scenes are impending here ;
That all is prepared ; that the hour is near
For welcomes, fellowships, and flow
Of sally, song, and cheer ;

That spigots are pulled and viols strung ;
That soon will arise the sound
Of measures trod to tunes renowned ;
That She will return in Love's low tongue
My vows as we wheel around.

MISCONCEPTION

I BUSIED myself to find a sure
Snug hermitage
That should preserve my Love secure
From the world's rage ;
Where no unseemly saturnals,
Or strident traffic-roars,
Or hum of intervolved cabals
Should echo at her doors.

I laboured that the diurnal spin
Of vanities
Should not contrive to suck her in
By dark degrees,
And cunningly operate to blur
Sweet teachings I had begun ;
And then I went full-heart to her
To expound the glad deeds done.

She looked at me, and said thereto
With a pitying smile,
" And *this* is what has busied you
So long a while ?

O poor exhausted one, I see
You have worn you old and thin
For naught! Those moils you fear for me
I find most pleasure in!"

THE VOICE OF THE THORN

I

When the thorn on the down
Quivers naked and cold,
And the mid-aged and old
Pace the path there to town,
In these words dry and drear
It seems to them sighing :
"O winter is trying
To sojourners here!"

II

When it stands fully tressed
On a hot summer day,
And the ewes there astray
Find its shade a sweet rest,
By the breath of the breeze
It inquires of each farer :
"Who would not be sharer
Of shadow with these?"

III

But by day or by night,
And in winter or summer,
Should I be the comer
Along that lone height,
In its voicing to me
Only one speech is spoken :
"Here once was nigh broken
A heart, and by thee."

FROM HER IN THE COUNTRY

I THOUGHT and thought of thy crass clanging
town
To folly, till convinced such dreams were ill,
I held my heart in bond, and tethered down
Fancy to where I was, by force of will.

I said : How beautiful are these flowers, this
wood,
One little bud is far more sweet to me
Than all man's urban shows ; and then I
stood
Urging new zest for bird, and bush, and tree ;

And strove to feel my nature brought it
forth
Of instinct, or no rural maid was I ;
But it was vain ; for I could not see worth
Enough around to charm a midge or fly,

And mused again on city din and sin,
Longing to madness I might move therein !

16 W. P. V., 1866.

HER CONFESSION

As some bland soul, to whom a debtor says
"I'll now repay the amount I owe to you,"
In inward gladness feigns forgetfulness
That such a payment ever was his due

(His long thought notwithstanding), so did I
At our last meeting waive your proffered kiss
With quick divergent talk of scenery nigh,
By such suspension to enhance my bliss.

And as his looks in consternation fall
When, gathering that the debt is lightly deemed,
The debtor makes as not to pay at all,
So faltered I, when your intention seemed

Converted by my false uneagerness
To putting off for ever the caress.

TO AN IMPERSONATOR OF ROSALIND

Did he who drew her in the years ago—
Till now conceived creator of her grace—
With telescopic sight high natures know,
Discern remote in Time's untravelled space

Your soft sweet mien, your gestures, as do we,
And with a copyist's hand but set them down,
Glowing yet more to dream our ecstasy
When his Original should be forthshown?

For, kindled by that animated eye,
Whereto all fairnesses about thee brim,
And by thy tender tones, what wight can fly
The wild conviction welling up in him

That he at length beholds woo, parley, plead,
The "very, very Rosalind" indeed!

8 Adelphi Terrace, 21*st April* 1867.

TO AN ACTRESS

I READ your name when you were strange to me,
Where it stood blazoned bold with many more ;
I passed it vacantly, and did not see
Any great glory in the shape it wore.

O cruelty, the insight barred me then !
Why did I not possess me with its sound,
And in its cadence catch and catch again
Your nature's essence floating therearound ?

Could *that* man be this I, unknowing you,
When now the knowing you is all of me,
And the old world of then is now a new,
And purpose no more what it used to be—
A thing of formal journeywork, but due
To springs that then were sealed up utterly ?

1867.

THE MINUTE BEFORE MEETING

The grey gaunt days dividing us in twain
Seemed hopeless hills my strength must faint to climb,
But they are gone ; and now I would detain
The few clock-beats that part us ; rein back Time,

And live in close expectance never closed
In change for far expectance closed at last,
So harshly has expectance been imposed
On my long need while these slow blank months passed.

And knowing that what is now about to be
Will all *have been* in O, so short a space!
I read beyond it my despondency
When more dividing months shall take its place,
Thereby denying to this hour of grace
A full-up measure of felicity.

1871.

HE ABJURES LOVE

At last I put off love,
For twice ten years
The daysman of my thought,
And hope, and doing;
Being ashamed thereof,
And faint of fears
And desolations, wrought
In his pursuing,

Since first in youthtime those
Disquietings
That heart-enslavement brings
To hale and hoary,
Became my housefellows,
And, fool and blind,
I turned from kith and kind
To give him glory.

I was as children be
Who have no care;
I did not shrink or sigh,
I did not sicken;

But lo, Love beckoned me,
And I was bare,
And poor, and starved, and dry,
And fever-stricken.

Too many times ablaze
With fatuous fires,
Enkindled by his wiles
To new embraces,
Did I, by wilful ways
And baseless ires,
Return the anxious smiles
Of friendly faces.

No more will now rate I
The common rare,
The midnight drizzle dew,
The gray hour golden,
The wind a yearning cry,
The faulty fair,
Things dreamt, of comelier hue
Than things beholden! . . .

—I speak as one who plumbs
Life's dim profound,
One who at length can sound
Clear views and certain.
But—after love what comes?
A scene that lours,
A few sad vacant hours,
And then, the Curtain.

1883.

A SET OF COUNTRY SONGS

LET ME ENJOY

(MINOR KEY)

I

Let me enjoy the earth no less
Because the all-enacting Might
That fashioned forth its loveliness
Had other aims than my delight.

II

About my path there flits a Fair,
Who throws me not a word or sign ;
I'll charm me with her ignoring air,
And laud those lips not meant for mine.

III

From manuscripts of moving song
Inspired by scenes and souls unknown,
I'll pour out raptures that belong
To others, as they were my own.

IV

And some day hence, toward Paradise,
And all its blest—if such should be—
I will lift glad, afar-off eyes,
Though it contain no place for me.

AT CASTERBRIDGE FAIR

I

The Ballad-Singer

Sing, Ballad-singer, raise a hearty tune ;
Make me forget that there was ever a one
I walked with in the meek light of the moon
When the day's work was done.

Rhyme, Ballad-rhymer, start a country song ;
Make me forget that she whom I loved well
Swore she would love me dearly, love me long,
Then—what I cannot tell !

Sing, Ballad-singer, from your little book ;
Make me forget those heart-breaks, achings, fears ;
Make me forget her name, her sweet sweet look—
Make me forget her tears.

II

Former Beauties

These market-dames, mid-aged, with lips thin-drawn,
And tissues sere,
Are they the ones we loved in years agone,
And courted here?

Are these the muslined pink young things to whom
We vowed and swore
In nooks on summer Sundays by the Froom,
Or Budmouth shore?

Do they remember those gay tunes we trod
Clasped on the green;
Aye; trod till moonlight set on the beaten sod
A satin sheen?

They must forget, forget! They cannot know
What once they were,
Or memory would transfigure them, and show
Them always fair.

III

After the Club-Dance

Black'on frowns east on Maidon,
And westward to the sea,
But on neither is his frown laden
With scorn, as his frown on me!

At dawn my heart grew heavy,
I could not sip the wine,
I left the jocund bevy
And that young man o' mine.

The roadside elms pass by me,—
Why do I sink with shame
When the birds a-perch there eye me?
They, too, have done the same!

IV

The Market-Girl

Nobody took any notice of her as she stood on the causey kerb,
All eager to sell her honey and apples and bunches of garden herb;

And if she had offered to give her wares
and herself with them too that day,
I doubt if a soul would have cared to take
a bargain so choice away.

But chancing to trace her sunburnt grace
that morning as I passed nigh,
I went and I said "Poor maidy dear!—and
will none of the people buy?"
And so it began; and soon we knew what
the end of it all must be,
And I found that though no others had bid,
a prize had been won by me.

V

The Inquiry

And are ye one of Hermitage—
Of Hermitage, by Ivel Road,
And do ye know, in Hermitage
A thatch-roofed house where sengreens grow?
And does John Waywood live there still—
He of the name that there abode
When father hurdled on the hill
Some fifteen years ago?

Does he now speak o' Patty Beech,
The Patty Beech he used to—see,
Or ask at all if Patty Beech
Is known or heard of out this way?

—Ask ever if she's living yet,
And where her present home may be,
And how she bears life's fag and fret
After so long a day?

In years agone at Hermitage
This faded face was counted fair,
None fairer; and at Hermitage
We swore to wed when he should thrive.
But never a chance had he or I,
And waiting made his wish outwear,
And Time, that dooms man's love to die,
Preserves a maid's alive.

VI

A Wife Waits

Will's at the dance in the Club-room below,
Where the tall liquor-cups foam;
I on the pavement up here by the Bow,
Wait, wait, to steady him home.

Will and his partner are treading a tune,
Loving companions they be;
Willy, before we were married in June,
Said he loved no one but me;

Said he would let his old pleasures all go
Ever to live with his Dear.

Will's at the dance in the Club-room below,
Shivering I wait for him here.

Note.—"The Bow" (line 3). The old name for the curved corner by the cross-streets in the middle of Casterbridge.

VII

After the Fair

The singers are gone from the Cornmarket-place
With their broadsheets of rhymes,
The street rings no longer in treble and bass
With their skits on the times,
And the Cross, lately thronged, is a dim naked space
That but echoes the stammering chimes.

From Clock-corner steps, as each quarter ding-dongs,
Away the folk roam
By the "Hart" and Grey's Bridge into byways and "drongs,"
Or across the ridged loam;
The younger ones shrilling the lately heard songs,
The old saying, "Would we were home."

The shy-seeming maiden so mute in the fair
Now rattles and talks,
And that one who looked the most swaggering there
Grows sad as she walks,
And she who seemed eaten by cankering care
In statuesque sturdiness stalks.

And midnight clears High Street of all but the ghosts
Of its buried burghees,
From the latest far back to those old Roman hosts
Whose remains one yet sees,
Who loved, laughed, and fought, hailed their friends, drank their toasts
At their meeting-times here, just as these!

1902.

NOTE.—"The Chimes" (line 6) will be listened for in vain here at midnight now, having been abolished some years ago.

THE DARK-EYED GENTLEMAN

I

I PITCHED my day's leazings in Crimmercrock Lane,
To tie up my garter and jog on again,
When a dear dark-eyed gentleman passed there and said,
In a way that made all o' me colour rose-red,
"What do I see—
O pretty knee!"
And he came and he tied up my garter for me.

II

'Twixt sunset and moonrise it was, I can mind:
Ah, 'tis easy to lose what we nevermore find!—
Of the dear stranger's home, of his name, I knew nought,

But I soon knew his nature and all that it brought.
Then bitterly
Sobbed I that he
Should ever have tied up my garter for me!

III

Yet now I've beside me a fine lissom lad,
And my slip's nigh forgot, and my days are not sad;
My own dearest joy is he, comrade, and friend,
He it is who safe-guards me, on him I depend;
No sorrow brings he,
And thankful I be
That his daddy once tied up my garter for me!

NOTE.—"Leazings" (line 1).—Bundle of gleaned corn.

TO CARREY CLAVEL

You turn your back, you turn your back,
And never your face to me,
Alone you take your homeward track,
And scorn my company.

What will you do when Charley's seen
Dewbeating down this way?
—You'll turn your back as now, you mean?
Nay, Carrey Clavel, nay!

You'll see none's looking; put your lip
Up like a tulip, so;
And he will coll you, bend, and sip:
Yes, Carrey, yes; I know!

THE ORPHANED OLD MAID

I WANTED to marry, but father said, "No—
'Tis weakness in women to give themselves so;
If you care for your freedom you'll listen to me,
Make a spouse in your pocket, and let the men be."

I spake on't again and again: father cried,
"Why—if you go husbanding, where shall I bide?
For never a home's for me elsewhere than here!"
And I yielded; for father had ever been dear.

But now father's gone, and I feel growing old,
And I'm lonely and poor in this house on the wold,
And my sweetheart that was found a partner elsewhere,
And nobody flings me a thought or a care.

THE SPRING CALL

Down Wessex way, when spring's a-shine,
The blackbird's "pret-ty de-urr!"
In Wessex accents marked as mine
Is heard afar and near.

He flutes it strong, as if in song
No R's of feebler tone
Than his appear in "pretty dear,"
Have blackbirds ever known.

Yet they pipe "prattie deerh!" I glean,
Beneath a Scottish sky,
And "pehty de-aw!" amid the treen
Of Middlesex or nigh.

While some folk say—perhaps in play—
Who know the Irish isle,
'Tis "purrity dare!" in treeland there
When songsters would beguile.

Well : I'll say what the listening birds
Say, hearing " pret-ty de-urr ! "—
However strangers sound such words,
That's how we sound them here.

Yes, in this clime at pairing time,
As soon as eyes can see her
At dawn of day, the proper way
To call is " pret-ty de-urr ! "

JULIE-JANE

Sing ; how 'a would sing !
How 'a would raise the tune
When we rode in the waggon from harvesting
By the light o' the moon !

Dance ; how 'a would dance !
If a fiddlestring did but sound
She would hold out her coats, give a slanting glance,
And go round and round.

Laugh ; how 'a would laugh !
Her peony lips would part
As if none such a place for a lover to quaff
At the deeps of a heart.

Julie, O girl of joy,
Soon, soon that lover he came.
Ah, yes ; and gave thee a baby-boy,
But never his name. . . .

—Tolling for her, as you guess ;
And the baby too. . . . 'Tis well.
You knew her in maidhood likewise ?—Yes,
That's her burial bell.

"I suppose," with a laugh, she said,
"I should blush that I'm not a wife ;
But how can it matter, so soon to be dead,
What one does in life ! "

When we sat making the mourning
By her death-bed side, said she,
" Dears, how can you keep from your lovers,
adorning
In honour of me ! "

Bubbling and brightsome eyed !
But now—O never again.
She chose her bearers before she died
From her fancy-men.

NOTE.—It is, or was, a common custom in Wessex, and probably other country places, to prepare the mourning beside the death-bed, the dying person sometimes assisting, who also selects his or her bearers on such occasions.

"Coats" (line 7).—Old name for petticoats.

NEWS FOR HER MOTHER

I

One mile more is
Where your door is
Mother mine!—
Harvest's coming,
Mills are strumming,
Apples fine,
And the cider made to-year will be as wine.

II

Yet, not viewing
What's a-doing
Here around
Is it thrills me,
And so fills me
That I bound
Like a ball or leaf or lamb along the ground.

III

Tremble not now
At your lot now
Silly soul!
Hosts have sped them
Quick to wed them,
Great and small,
Since the first two sighing half-hearts made a whole.

IV

Yet I wonder,
Will it sunder
Her from me?
Will she guess that
I said "Yes,"—that
His I'd be,
Ere I thought she might not see him as I see!

V

Old brown gable,
Granary, stable,
Here you are!
O my mother,
Can another
Ever bar
Mine from thy heart, make thy nearness seem afar?

THE FIDDLER

The fiddler knows what's brewing
To the lilt of his lyric wiles:
The fiddler knows what rueing
Will come of this night's smiles!

He sees couples join them for dancing,
And afterwards joining for life,
He sees them pay high for their prancing
By a welter of wedded strife.

He twangs: "Music hails from the devil,
Though vaunted to come from heaven,
For it makes people do at a revel
What multiplies sins by seven.

"There's many a heart now mangled,
And waiting its time to go,
Whose tendrils were first entangled
By my sweet viol and bow!"

THE HUSBAND'S VIEW

"Can anything avail
Beldame, for my hid grief?—
Listen: I'll tell the tale,
It may bring faint relief!—

"I came where I was not known,
In hope to flee my sin;
And walking forth alone
A young man said, 'Good e'en.'

"In gentle voice and true
He asked to marry me;
'You only—only you
Fulfil my dream!' said he.

"We married o' Monday morn,
In the month of hay and flowers;
My cares were nigh forsworn,
And perfect love was ours.

"But ere the days are long
Untimely fruit will show;
My Love keeps up his song,
Undreaming it is so.

"And I awake in the night,
And think of months gone by,
And of that cause of flight
Hidden from my Love's eye.

"Discovery borders near,
And then! . . . But something stirred?—
My husband—he is here!
Heaven—has he overheard?"—

"Yes; I have heard, sweet Nan;
I have known it all the time.
I am not a particular man;
Misfortunes are no crime:

"And what with our serious need
Of sons for soldiering,
That accident, indeed,
To maids, is a useful thing!"

ROSE-ANN

Why didn't you say you was promised, Rose-Ann?
Why didn't you name it to me,
Ere ever you tempted me hither, Rose-Ann,
So often, so wearifully?

O why did you let me be near 'ee, Rose-Ann,
Talking things about wedlock so free,
And never by nod or by whisper, Rose-Ann,
Give a hint that it wasn't to be?

Down home I was raising a flock of stock ewes,
Cocks and hens, and wee chickens by scores,
And lavendered linen all ready to use,
A-dreaming that they would be yours.

Mother said: "She's a sport-making maiden, my son";
And a pretty sharp quarrel had we;

O why do you prove by this wrong you have done
That I saw not what mother could see?

Never once did you say you was promised, Rose-Ann,
Never once did I dream it to be;
And it cuts to the heart to be treated, Rose-Ann,
As you in your scorning treat me!

THE HOMECOMING

Gruffly growled the wind on Toller downland broad and bare,
And lonesome was the house, and dark; and few came there.

"Now don't ye rub your eyes so red; we're home and have no cares;
Here's a skimmer-cake for supper, peckled onions, and some pears;
I've got a little keg o' summat strong, too, under stairs:
—What, slight your husband's victuals? Other brides can tackle theirs!"

The wind of winter mooed and mouthed their chimney like a horn,
And round the house and past the house 'twas leafless and lorn.

"But my dear and tender poppet, then, how came ye to agree
In Ivel church this morning? Sure, there-right you married me!"

—"Hoo-hoo !—I don't know—I forgot how
strange and far 'twould be,
An' I wish I was at home again with dear
daddee ! "

Gruffly growled the wind on Toller downland
broad and bare,
And lonesome was the house and dark; and
few came there.

"I didn't think such furniture as this was
all you'd own,
And great black beams for ceiling, and a
floor o' wretched stone,
And nasty pewter platters, horrid forks of
steel and bone,
And a monstrous crock in chimney. 'Twas
to me quite unbeknown ! "

Rattle rattle went the door; down flapped a
cloud of smoke,
As shifting north the wicked wind assayed a
smarter stroke.

"Now sit ye by the fire, poppet; put
yourself at ease :
And keep your little thumb out of your
mouth, dear, please !
And I'll sing to 'ee a pretty song of lovely
flowers and bees,
And happy lovers taking walks within a
grove o' trees."

Gruffly growled the wind on Toller Down, so bleak and bare,
And lonesome was the house, and dark; and few came there.

"Now, don't ye gnaw your handkercher; 'twill hurt your little tongue,
And if you do feel spitish, 'tis because ye are over young;
But you'll be getting older, like us all, ere very long,
And you'll see me as I am—a man who never did 'ee wrong."

Straight from Whit'sheet Hill to Benvill Lane the blusters pass,
Hitting hedges, milestones, handposts, trees, and tufts of grass.

"Well, had I on'y known, my dear, that this was how you'd be,
I'd have married her of riper years that was so fond of me.
But since I can't, I've half a mind to run away to sea,
And leave 'ee to go barefoot to your d—d daddee!"

Up one wall and down the other—past each window-pane—
Prance the gusts, and then away down Crimmercrock's long lane.

"I—I—don't know what to say to't, since
your wife I've vowed to be;
And as 'tis done, I s'pose here I must bide
—poor me!
Aye—as you are ki-ki-kind, I'll try to live
along with 'ee,
Although I'd fain have stayed at home with
dear daddee!"

Gruffly growled the wind on Toller Down, so
bleak and bare,
And lonesome was the house and dark; and
few came there.

"That's right, my Heart! And though
on haunted Toller Down we be,
And the wind swears things in chimley, we'll
to supper merrily!
So don't ye tap your shoe so pettish-like;
but smile at me,
And ye'll soon forget to sock and sigh for
dear daddee!"

December 1901.

PIECES OCCASIONAL AND VARIOUS

A CHURCH ROMANCE

(Mellstock : *circa* 1835)

She turned in the high pew, until her sight
Swept the west gallery, and caught its row
Of music-men with viol, book, and bow
Against the sinking sad tower-window light.

She turned again ; and in her pride's despite
One strenuous viol's inspirer seemed to throw
A message from his string to her below,
Which said : "I claim thee as my own forthright!"

Thus their hearts' bond began, in due time signed.
And long years thence, when Age had scared Romance,
At some old attitude of his or glance
That gallery-scene would break upon her mind,
With him as minstrel, ardent, young, and trim,
Bowing "New Sabbath" or "Mount Ephraim."

THE RASH BRIDE

An Experience of the Mellstock Quire

I

We Christmas-carolled down the Vale, and
up the Vale, and round the Vale,
We played and sang that night as we were
yearly wont to do—
A carol in a minor key, a carol in the major
D,
Then at each house: "Good wishes: many
Christmas joys to you!"

II

Next, to the widow's John and I and all the
rest drew on. And I
Discerned that John could hardly hold the
tongue of him for joy.
The widow was a sweet young thing whom
John was bent on marrying,
And quiring at her casement seemed romantic
to the boy.

III

"She'll make reply, I trust," said he, "to our salute? She must!" said he,
"And then I will accost her gently—much to her surprise!—
For knowing not I am with you here, when I speak up and call her dear
A tenderness will fill her voice, a bashfulness her eyes."

IV

So, by her window-square we stood; ay, with our lanterns there we stood,
And he along with us,—not singing, waiting for a sign;
And when we'd quired her carols three a light was lit and out looked she,
A shawl about her bedgown, and her colour red as wine.

V

And sweetly then she bowed her thanks, and smiled, and spoke aloud her thanks;
When lo, behind her back there, in the room, a man appeared.
I knew him—one from Woolcomb way—Giles Swetman—honest as the day,
But eager, hasty; and I felt that some strange trouble neared.

VI

"How comes he there? . . . Suppose," said we, "she's wed!" said we. "Who knows?" said we.
—"She married yester-morning — only mother yet has known
The secret o't!" shrilled one small boy. "But now I've told, let's wish 'em joy!"
A heavy fall aroused us: John had gone down like a stone.

VII

We rushed to him and caught him round, and lifted him, and brought him round,
When, hearing something wrong had happened, oped the window she:
"Has one of you fallen ill?" she asked, "by these night labours overtasked?"
None answered. That she'd done poor John a cruel turn felt we.

VIII

Till up spoke Michael: "Fie, young dame! You've broke your promise, sly young dame,
By forming this new tie, young dame, and jilting John so true,

Who trudged to-night to sing to 'ee because
he thought he'd bring to 'ee
Good wishes as your coming spouse. May
ye such trifling rue!"

IX

Her man had said no word at all; but being
behind had heard it all,
And now cried: "Neighbours, on my soul I
knew not 'twas like this!"
And then to her: "If I had known you'd
had in tow not me alone,
No wife should you have been of mine. It
is a dear bought bliss!"

X

She changed death-white, and heaved a cry:
we'd never heard so grieved a cry
As came from her at this from him: heart-
broken quite seemed she;
And suddenly, as we looked on, she turned,
and rushed; and she was gone,
Whither, her husband, following after, knew
not; nor knew we.

XI

We searched till dawn about the house;
within the house, without the house,
We searched among the laurel boughs that
grew beneath the wall,
And then among the crocks and things, and
stores for winter junketings,
In linhay, loft, and dairy; but we found her
not at all.

XII

Then John rushed in: "O friends," he said,
"hear this, this, this!" and bends his
head:
"I've—searched round by the—*well*, and
find the cover open wide!
I am fearful that—I can't say what . . .
Bring lanterns, and some cords to knot."
We did so, and we went and stood the deep
dark hole beside.

XIII

And then they, ropes in hand, and I—ay,
John, and all the band, and I
Let down a lantern to the depths—some
hundred feet and more;
It glimmered like a fog-dimmed star; and
there, beside its light, afar,
White drapery floated, and we knew the
meaning that it bore.

XIV

The rest is naught. . . . We buried her o'
Sunday. Neighbours carried her ;
And Swetman—he who'd married her—now
miserablest of men,
Walked mourning first ; and then walked
John ; just quivering, but composed
anon ;
And we the quire formed round the grave,
as was the custom then.

XV

Our old bass player, as I recall—his white
hair blown—but why recall !—
His viol upstrapped, bent figure—doomed to
follow her full soon—
Stood bowing, pale and tremulous ; and next
to him the rest of us. . . .
We sang the Ninetieth Psalm to her—set to
Saint Stephen's tune.

THE DEAD QUIRE

I

Beside the Mead of Memories,
Where Church-way mounts to Moaning Hill,
The sad man sighed his phantasies:
He seems to sigh them still.

II

"'Twas the Birth-tide Eve, and the hamleteers
Made merry with ancient Mellstock zest,
But the Mellstock quire of former years
Had entered into rest.

III

"Old Dewy lay by the gaunt yew tree,
And Reuben and Michael a pace behind,
And Bowman with his family
By the wall that the ivies bind.

IV

"The singers had followed one by one,
Treble, and tenor, and thorough-bass;
And the worm that wasteth had begun
To mine their mouldering place.

V

"For two-score years, ere Christ-day light,
Mellstock had throbbed to strains from these;
But now there echoed on the night
No Christmas harmonies.

VI

"Three meadows off, at a dormered inn,
The youth had gathered in high carouse,
And, ranged on settles, some therein
Had drunk them to a drowse.

VII

"Loud, lively, reckless, some had grown,
Each dandling on his jigging knee
Eliza, Dolly, Nance, or Joan—
Livers in levity.

VIII

"The taper flames and hearthfire shine
Grew smoke-hazed to a lurid light,
And songs on subjects not divine
Were warbled forth that night.

IX

"Yet many were sons and grandsons here
Of those who, on such eves gone by,
At that still hour had throated clear
Their anthems to the sky.

X

"The clock belled midnight; and ere long
One shouted, 'Now 'tis Christmas morn;
Here's to our women old and young,
And to John Barleycorn!'

XI

"They drink the toast and shout again:
The pewter-ware rings back the boom,
And for a breath-while follows then
A silence in the room.

XII

"When nigh without, as in old days,
The ancient quire of voice and string
Seemed singing words of prayer and praise
As they had used to sing.

XIII

"*While shepherds watch'd their flocks by night,*—
Thus swells the long familiar sound
In many a quaint symphonic flight—
To, *Glory shone around.*

XIV

"The sons defined their fathers' tones,
The widow his whom she had wed,
And others in the minor moans
The viols of the dead.

XV

"Something supernal has the sound
As verse by verse the strain proceeds,
And stilly staring on the ground
Each roysterer holds and heeds.

XVI

"Towards its chorded closing bar
Plaintively, thinly, waned the hymn,
Yet lingered, like the notes afar
Of banded seraphim.

XVII

"With brows abashed, and reverent tread,
The hearkeners sought the tavern door:
But nothing, save wan moonlight, spread
The empty highway o'er.

XVIII

"While on their hearing fixed and tense
The aerial music seemed to sink,
As it were gently moving thence
Along the river brink.

XIX

"Then did the Quick pursue the Dead
By crystal Froom that crinkles there;
And still the viewless quire ahead
Voiced the old holy air.

XX

"By Bank-walk wicket, brightly bleached,
It passed, and 'twixt the hedges twain,
Dogged by the living; till it reached
The bottom of Church Lane.

XXI

"There, at the turning, it was heard
Drawing to where the churchyard lay:
But when they followed thitherward
It smalled, and died away.

XXII

"Each headstone of the quire, each mound,
Confronted them beneath the moon;
But no more floated therearound
That ancient Birth-night tune.

XXIII

"There Dewy lay by the gaunt yew tree,
There Reuben and Michael, a pace behind,
And Bowman with his family
By the wall that the ivies bind. . . .

XXIV

"As from a dream each sobered son
Awoke, and musing reached his door:
'Twas said that of them all, not one
Sat in a tavern more."

XXV

—The sad man ceased; and ceased to heed
His listener, and crossed the leaze
From Moaning Hill towards the mead—
The Mead of Memories.

1897.

THE CHRISTENING

Whose child is this they bring
Into the aisle?—
At so superb a thing
The congregation smile
And turn their heads awhile.

Its eyes are blue and bright,
Its cheeks like rose;
Its simple robes unite
Whitest of calicoes
With lawn, and satin bows.

A pride in the human race
At this paragon
Of mortals, lights each face
While the old rite goes on;
But ah, they are shocked anon.

What girl is she who peeps
From the gallery stair,
Smiles palely, redly weeps,
With feverish furtive air
As though not fitly there?

"I am the baby's mother;
This gem of the race
The decent fain would smother,
And for my deep disgrace
I am bidden to leave the place."

"Where is the baby's father?"—
"In the woods afar.
He says there is none he'd rather
Meet under moon or star
Than me, of all that are.

"To clasp me in lovelike weather,
Wish fixing when,
He says: To be together
At will, just now and then,
Makes him the blest of men;

"But chained and doomed for life
To slovening
As vulgar man and wife,
He says, is another thing:
Yea: sweet Love's sepulchring!"

1904.

A DREAM QUESTION

"It shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine."
Micah iii. 6.

I ASKED the Lord: "Sire, is this true
Which hosts of theologians hold,
That when we creatures censure you
For shaping griefs and ails untold
(Deeming them punishments undue)
You rage, as Moses wrote of old?

When we exclaim: 'Beneficent
He is not, for he orders pain,
Or, if so, not omnipotent:
To a mere child the thing is plain!'
Those who profess to represent
You, cry out: 'Impious and profane!'"

He: "Save me from my friends, who deem
That I care what my creatures say!
Mouth as you list: sneer, rail, blaspheme,
O manikin, the livelong day,
Not one grief-groan or pleasure-gleam
Will you increase or take away.

"Why things are thus, whoso derides,
May well remain my secret still . . . .
A fourth dimension, say the guides,
To matter is conceivable.
Think some such mystery resides
Within the ethic of my will."

BY THE BARROWS

Not far from Mellstock—so tradition saith—
Where barrows, bulging as they bosoms were
Of Multimammia stretched supinely there,
Catch night and noon the tempest's wanton breath,

A battle, desperate doubtless unto death,
Was one time fought. The outlook, lone and bare,
The towering hawk and passing raven share,
And all the upland round is called "The He'th."

Here once a woman, in our modern age,
Fought singlehandedly to shield a child—
One not her own—from a man's senseless rage.
And to my mind no patriots' bones there piled
So consecrate the silence as her deed
Of stoic and devoted self-unheed.

A WIFE AND ANOTHER

"War ends, and he's returning
Early; yea,
The evening next to-morrow's!"—
—This I say
To her, whom I suspiciously survey,

Holding my husband's letter
To her view.—
She glanced at it but lightly,
And I knew
That one from him that day had reached her too.

There was no time for scruple;
Secretly
I filched her missive, conned it,
Learnt that he
Would lodge with her ere he came home to me.

To reach the port before her,
And, unscanned,

There wait to intercept them
Soon I planned :
That, in her stead, *I* might before him stand.

So purposed, so effected ;
At the inn
Assigned, I found her hidden :—
O that sin
Should bear what she bore when I entered in !

Her heavy lids grew laden
With despairs,
Her lips made soundless movements
Unawares,
While I peered at the chamber hired as theirs.

And as beside its doorway,
Deadly hued,
One inside, one withoutside
We two stood,
He came—my husband—as she knew he would.

No pleasurable triumph
Was that sight !
The ghastly disappointment
Broke them quite.
What love was theirs, to move them with such might !

"Madam, forgive me!" said she,
Sorrow bent,
"A child—I soon shall bear him . . . .
Yes—I meant
To tell you—that he won me ere he went."

Then, as it were, within me
Something snapped,
As if my soul had largened:
Conscience-capped,
I saw myself the snarer—them the trapped.

"My hate dies, and I promise,
Grace-beguiled,"
I said, "to care for you, be
Reconciled;
And cherish, and take interest in the child."

Without more words I pressed him
Through the door
Within which she stood, powerless
To say more,
And closed it on them, and downstairward bore.

"He joins his wife—my sister,"
I, below,
Remarked in going—lightly—
Even as though
All had come right, and we had arranged it so . . . .

As I, my road retracing,
Left them free,
The night alone embracing
Childless me,
I held I had not stirred God wrothfully.

THE ROMAN ROAD

The Roman Road runs straight and bare
As the pale parting-line in hair
Across the heath. And thoughtful men
Contrast its days of Now and Then,
And delve, and measure, and compare;

Visioning on the vacant air
Helmed legionaries, who proudly rear
The Eagle, as they pace again
The Roman Road.

But no tall brass-helmed legionnaire
Haunts it for me. Uprises there
A mother's form upon my ken,
Guiding my infant steps, as when
We walked that ancient thoroughfare,
The Roman Road.

THE VAMPIRINE FAIR

GILBERT had sailed to India's shore,
And I was all alone:
My lord came in at my open door
And said, "O fairest one!"

He leant upon the slant bureau,
And sighed, "I am sick for thee!"
"My lord," said I, "pray speak not so,
Since wedded wife I be."

Leaning upon the slant bureau,
Bitter his next words came:
"So much I know; and likewise know
My love burns on the same!

"But since you thrust my love away,
And since it knows no cure,
I must live out as best I may
The ache that I endure."

When Michaelmas browned the nether
Coomb,
And Wingreen Hill above,
And made the hollyhocks rags of bloom,
My lord grew ill of love.

My lord grew ill with love for me;
Gilbert was far from port;
And—so it was—that time did see
Me housed at Manor Court.

About the bowers of Manor Court
The primrose pushed its head
When, on a day at last, report
Arrived of him I had wed.

"Gilbert, my lord, is homeward bound,
His sloop is drawing near,
What shall I do when I am found
Not in his house but here?"

"O I will heal the injuries
I've done to him and thee.
I'll give him means to live at ease
Afar from Shastonb'ry."

When Gilbert came we both took thought:
"Since comfort and good cheer,"
Said he, "So readily are bought,
He's welcome to thee, Dear."

So when my lord flung liberally
His gold in Gilbert's hands,
I coaxed and got my brothers three
Made stewards of his lands.

And then I coaxed him to install
My other kith and kin,
With aim to benefit them all
Before his love ran thin.

And next I craved to be possessed
Of plate and jewels rare.
He groaned: "You give me, Love, no rest,
Take all the law will spare!"

And so in course of years my wealth
Became a goodly hoard,
My steward brethren, too, by stealth
Had each a fortune stored.

Thereafter in the gloom he'd walk,
And by and by began
To say aloud in absent talk,
"I am a ruined man!—

"I hardly could have thought," he said,
"When first I looked on thee,
That one so soft, so rosy red,
Could thus have beggared me!"

Seeing his fair estates in pawn,
And him in such decline,
I knew that his domain had gone
To lift up me and mine.

Next month upon a Sunday morn
A gunshot sounded nigh :
By his own hand my lordly born
Had doomed himself to die.

" Live, my dear lord, and much of thine
Shall be restored to thee ! "
He smiled, and said 'twixt word and sign,
" Alas—that cannot be ! "

And while I searched his cabinet
For letters, keys, or will,
'Twas touching that his gaze was set
With love upon me still.

And when I burnt each document
Before his dying eyes,
'Twas sweet that he did not resent
My fear of compromise.

The steeple-cock gleamed golden when
I watched his spirit go :
And I became repentant then
That I had wrecked him so.

Three weeks at least had come and gone,
With many a saddened word,
Before I wrote to Gilbert on
The stroke that so had stirred.

And having worn a mournful gown,
I joined, in decent while,
My husband at a dashing town
To live in dashing style.

Yet though I now enjoy my fling,
And dine and dance and drive,
I'd give my prettiest emerald ring
To see my lord alive.

And when the meet on hunting-days
Is near his churchyard home,
I leave my bantering beaux to place
A flower upon his tomb;

And sometimes say: "Perhaps too late
The saints in Heaven deplore
That tender time when, moved by Fate,
He darked my cottage door."

THE REMINDER

While I watch the Christmas blaze
Paint the room with ruddy rays,
Something makes my vision glide
To the frosty scene outside.

There, to reach a rotting berry,
Toils a thrush,—constrained to very
Dregs of food by sharp distress,
Taking such with thankfulness.

Why, O starving bird, when I
One day's joy would justify,
And put misery out of view,
Do you make me notice you!

THE RAMBLER

I do not see the hills around,
Nor mark the tints the copses wear ;
I do not note the grassy ground
And constellated daisies there.

I hear not the contralto note
Of cuckoos hid on either hand,
The whirr that shakes the nighthawk's throat
When eve's brown awning hoods the land.

Some say each songster, tree, and mead—
All eloquent of love divine—
Receives their constant careful heed :
Such keen appraisement is not mine.

The tones around me that I hear,
The aspects, meanings, shapes I see,
Are those far back ones missed when near,
And now perceived too late by me !

NIGHT IN THE OLD HOME

When the wasting embers redden the
chimney-breast,
And Life's bare pathway looms like a desert
track to me,
And from hall and parlour the living have
gone to their rest,
My perished people who housed them here
come back to me.

They come and seat them around in their
mouldy places,
Now and then bending towards me a glance
of wistfulness,
A strange upbraiding smile upon all their
faces,
And in the bearing of each a passive tristful-
ness.

"Do you uphold me, lingering and languish-
ing here,
A pale late plant of your once strong
stock?" I say to them;

"A thinker of crooked thoughts upon Life in the sere,
And on That which consigns men to night after showing the day to them?"

"—O let be the Wherefore! We fevered our years not thus:
Take of Life what it grants, without question!" they answer me seemingly.
"Enjoy, suffer, wait: spread the table here freely like us,
And, satisfied, placid, unfretting, watch Time away beamingly!"

AFTER THE LAST BREATH

(J. H. 1813–1904)

THERE's no more to be done, or feared, or hoped;
None now need watch, speak low, and list, and tire;
No irksome crease outsmoothed, no pillow sloped
Does she require.

Blankly we gaze. We are free to go or stay;
Our morrow's anxious plans have missed their aim;
Whether we leave to-night or wait till day
Counts as the same.

The lettered vessels of medicaments
Seem asking wherefore we have set them here;
Each palliative its silly face presents
As useless gear.

And yet we feel that something savours well;
We note a numb relief withheld before;

Our well-beloved is prisoner in the cell
Of Time no more.

We see by littles now the deft achievement
Whereby she has escaped the Wrongers all,
In view of which our momentary bereavement
Outshapes but small.

1904.

IN CHILDBED

In the middle of the night
Mother's spirit came and spoke to me,
Looking weariful and white—
As 'twere untimely news she broke to me.

"O my daughter, joyed are you
To own the weetless child you mother there;
'Men may search the wide world through,'
You think, 'nor find so fair another there!'

"Dear, this midnight time unwombs
Thousands just as rare and beautiful;
Thousands whom High Heaven foredooms
To be as bright, as good, as dutiful.

"Source of ecstatic hopes and fears
And innocent maternal vanity,
Your fond exploit but shapes for tears
New thoroughfares in sad humanity.

"Yet as you dream, so dreamt I
When Life stretched forth its morning ray
to me;
Other views for by and by!" . . . .
Such strange things did mother say to me.

THE PINE PLANTERS

(Marty South's Reverie)

I

We work here together
In blast and breeze;
He fills the earth in,
I hold the trees.

He does not notice
That what I do
Keeps me from moving
And chills me through.

He has seen one fairer
I feel by his eye,
Which skims me as though
I were not by.

And since she passed here
He scarce has known
But that the woodland
Holds him alone.

I have worked here with him
Since morning shine,
He busy with his thoughts
And I with mine.

I have helped him so many,
So many days,
But never win any
Small word of praise!

Shall I not sigh to him
That I work on
Glad to be nigh to him
Though hope is gone?

Nay, though he never
Knew love like mine,
I'll bear it ever
And make no sign!

II

From the bundle at hand here
I take each tree,
And set it to stand, here
Always to be;
When, in a second,
As if from fear
Of Life unreckoned
Beginning here,

It starts a sighing
Through day and night,
Though while there lying
'Twas voiceless quite.

It will sigh in the morning,
Will sigh at noon,
At the winter's warning,
In wafts of June ;
Grieving that never
Kind Fate decreed
It should for ever
Remain a seed,
And shun the welter
Of things without,
Unneeding shelter
From storm and drought.

Thus, all unknowing
For whom or what
We set it growing
In this bleak spot,
It still will grieve here
Throughout its time,
Unable to leave here,
Or change its clime ;
Or tell the story
Of us to-day
When, halt and hoary,
We pass away.

THE DEAR

I PLODDED to Fairmile Hill-top, where
A maiden one fain would guard
From every hazard and every care
Advanced on the roadside sward.

I wondered how succeeding suns
Would shape her wayfarings,
And wished some Power might take such ones
Under Its warding wings.

The busy breeze came up the hill
And smartened her cheek to red,
And frizzled her hair to a haze. With a will
"Good-morning, my Dear!" I said.

She glanced from me to the far-off gray,
And, with proud severity,
"Good-morning to you—though I may say
I am not *your* Dear," quoth she:

"For I am the Dear of one not here—
One far from his native land!"—
And she passed me by; and I did not try
To make her understand.

1901.

ONE WE KNEW

(M. H. 1772–1857)

She told how they used to form for the country dances—
"The Triumph," "The New-rigged Ship"—
To the light of the guttering wax in the panelled manses,
And in cots to the blink of a dip.

She spoke of the wild "poussetting" and "allemanding"
On carpet, on oak, and on sod;
And the two long rows of ladies and gentlemen standing,
And the figures the couples trod.

She showed us the spot where the maypole was yearly planted,
And where the bandsmen stood
While breeched and kerchiefed partners whirled, and panted
To choose each other for good.

She told of that far-back day when they learnt astounded
Of the death of the King of France:
Of the Terror; and then of Bonaparte's unbounded
Ambition and arrogance.

Of how his threats woke warlike preparations
Along the southern strand,
And how each night brought tremors and trepidations
Lest morning should see him land.

She said she had often heard the gibbet creaking
As it swayed in the lightning flash,
Had caught from the neighbouring town a small child's shrieking
At the cart-tail under the lash. . . .

With cap-framed face and long gaze into the embers—
We seated around her knees—
She would dwell on such dead themes, not as one who remembers,
But rather as one who sees.

She seemed one left behind of a band gone
distant
So far that no tongue could hail :
Past things retold were to her as things
existent,
Things present but as a tale.

May 20, 1902.

SHE HEARS THE STORM

THERE was a time in former years—
While my roof-tree was his—
When I should have been distressed by fears
At such a night as this!

I should have murmured anxiously,
"The pricking rain strikes cold;
His road is bare of hedge or tree,
And he is getting old."

But now the fitful chimney-roar,
The drone of Thorncombe trees,
The Froom in flood upon the moor,
The mud of Mellstock Leaze,

The candle slanting sooty wick'd,
The thuds upon the thatch,
The eaves-drops on the window flicked,
The clacking garden-hatch,

And what they mean to wayfarers,
I scarcely heed or mind;
He has won that storm-tight roof of hers
Which Earth grants all her kind.

A WET NIGHT

I PACE along, the rain-shafts riddling me,
Mile after mile out by the moorland way,
And up the hill, and through the ewe-leaze gray
Into the lane, and round the corner tree ;

Where, as my clothing clams me, mire-bestarred,
And the enfeebled light dies out of day,
Leaving the liquid shades to reign, I say,
" This is a hardship to be calendared ! "

Yet sires of mine now perished and forgot,
When worse beset, ere roads were shapen here,
And night and storm were foes indeed to fear,
Times numberless have trudged across this spot
In sturdy muteness on their strenuous lot,
And taking all such toils as trifles mere.

BEFORE LIFE AND AFTER

A TIME there was—as one may guess
And as, indeed, earth's testimonies tell—
Before the birth of consciousness,
When all went well.

None suffered sickness, love, or loss,
None knew regret, starved hope, or heart-burnings;
None cared whatever crash or cross
Brought wrack to things.

If something ceased, no tongue bewailed,
If something winced and waned, no heart was wrung;
If brightness dimmed, and dark prevailed,
No sense was stung.

But the disease of feeling germed,
And primal rightness took the tinct of wrong;
Ere nescience shall be reaffirmed
How long, how long?

NEW YEAR'S EVE

"I HAVE finished another year," said God,
"In grey, green, white, and brown;
I have strewn the leaf upon the sod,
Sealed up the worm within the clod,
And let the last sun down."

"And what's the good of it?" I said.
"What reasons made you call
From formless void this earth we tread,
When nine-and-ninety can be read
Why nought should be at all?

"Yea, Sire; why shaped you us, 'who in
This tabernacle groan'—
If ever a joy be found herein,
Such joy no man had wished to win
If he had never known!"

Then he: "My labours—logicless—
You may explain; not I:
Sense-sealed I have wrought, without a guess
That I evolved a Consciousness
To ask for reasons why.

"Strange that ephemeral creatures who
By my own ordering are,
Should see the shortness of my view,
Use ethic tests I never knew,
Or made provision for!"

He sank to raptness as of yore,
And opening New Year's Day
Wove it by rote as theretofore,
And went on working evermore
In his unweeting way.

1906.

GOD'S EDUCATION

I saw him steal the light away
That haunted in her eye:
It went so gently none could say
More than that it was there one day
And missing by-and-by.

I watched her longer, and he stole
Her lily tincts and rose;
All her young sprightliness of soul
Next fell beneath his cold control,
And disappeared like those.

I asked: "Why do you serve her so?
Do you, for some glad day,
Hoard these her sweets—?" He said, "O no,
They charm not me; I bid Time throw
Them carelessly away."

Said I: "We call that cruelty—
We, your poor mortal kind."
He mused. "The thought is new to me.
Forsooth, though I men's master be,
Theirs is the teaching mind!"

TO SINCERITY

O SWEET sincerity !—
Where modern methods be
What scope for thine and thee ?

Life may be sad past saying,
Its greens for ever graying,
Its faiths to dust decaying ;

And youth may have foreknown it,
And riper seasons shown it,
But custom cries : " Disown it :

" Say ye rejoice, though grieving,
Believe, while unbelieving,
Behold, without perceiving ! "

—Yet, would men look at true things,
And unilluded view things,
And count to bear undue things,

The real might mend the seeming,
Facts better their foredeeming,
And Life its disesteeming.

February, 1899.

PANTHERA

(For other forms of this legend—first met with in the second century—see Origen contra Celsum ; the Talmud ; Sepher Toldoth Jeschu ; quoted fragments of lost Apocryphal gospels ; Strauss, Haeckel ; etc.)

YEA, as I sit here, crutched, and cricked, and bent,
I think of Panthera, who underwent
Much from insidious aches in his decline ;
But his aches were not radical like mine ;
They were the twinges of old wounds—the feel
Of the hand he had lost, shorn by barbarian steel,
Which came back, so he said, at a change in the air,
Fingers and all, as if it still were there.
My pains are otherwise : upclosing cramps
And stiffened tendons from this country's damps,
Where Panthera was never commandant.—
The Fates sent him by way of the Levant.

He had been blithe in his young manhood's time,
And as centurion carried well his prime.
In Ethiop, Araby, climes fair and fell,
He had seen service and had borne him well.
Nought shook him then: he was serene as brave;
Yet later knew some shocks, and would grow grave
When pondering them; shocks less of corporal kind
Than phantom-like, that disarranged his mind;
And it was in the way of warning me
(By much his junior) against levity
That he recounted them; and one in chief
Panthera loved to set in bold relief.

This was a tragedy of his Eastern days,
Personal in touch—though I have sometimes thought
That touch a possible delusion—wrought
Of half-conviction carried to a craze—
His mind at last being stressed by ails and age:—
Yet his good faith thereon I well could wage.

I had said it long had been a wish with me
That I might leave a scion—some small tree
As channel for my sap, if not my name—
Ay, offspring even of no legitimate claim,

In whose advance I secretly could joy.
Thereat he warmed.
"Cancel such wishes, boy!
A son may be a comfort or a curse,
A seer, a doer, a coward, a fool; yea, worse—
A criminal. . . . That I could testify!" . . .
"Panthera has no guilty son!" cried I
All unbelieving. "Friend, you do not know,"
He darkly dropt: "True, I've none now to show,
For *the law took him.* Ay, in sooth, Jove shaped it so!"

"This noon is not unlike," he again began,
"The noon these pricking memories print on me—
Yea, that day, when the sun grew copper-red,
And I served in Judæa . . . 'Twas a date
Of rest for arms. The *Pax Romana* ruled,
To the chagrin of frontier legionaries!
Palestine was annexed—though sullen yet,—
I, being in age some two-score years and ten
And having the garrison in Jerusalem
Part in my hands as acting officer
Under the Governor. A tedious time
I found it, of routine, amid a folk
Restless, contentless, and irascible.—
Quelling some riot, sentrying court and hall,
Sending men forth on public meeting-days
To maintain order, were my duties there.

"Then came a morn in spring, and the cheerful sun
Whitened the city and the hills around,
And every mountain-road that clambered them,
Tincturing the greyness of the olives warm,
And the rank cacti round the valley's sides.
The day was one whereon death-penalties
Were put in force, and here and there were set
The soldiery for order, as I said,
Since one of the condemned had raised some heat,
And crowds surged passionately to see him slain.
I, mounted on a Cappadocian horse,
With some half-company of auxiliaries,
Had captained the procession through the streets
When it came streaming from the judgment-hall
After the verdicts of the Governor.
It drew to the great gate of the northern way
That bears towards Damascus; and to a knoll
Upon the common, just beyond the walls—
Whence could be swept a wide horizon round
Over the housetops to the remotest heights.
Here was the public execution-ground
For city crimes, called then and doubtless now
Golgotha, Cranion, or Calvaria.

"The usual dooms were duly meted out;
Some three or four were stript, transfixed, and nailed,
And no great stir occurred. A day of wont
It was to me, so far, and would have slid
Clean from my memory at its squalid close
But for an incident that followed these.

"Among the tag-rag rabble of either sex
That hung around the wretches as they writhed,
Till thrust back by our spears, one held my eye—
A weeping woman, whose strained countenance,
Sharpened against a looming livid cloud,
Was mocked by the crude rays of afternoon—
The mother of one of those who suffered there
I had heard her called when spoken roughly to
By my ranged men for pressing forward so.
It stole upon me hers was a face I knew;
Yet when, or how, I had known it, for a while
Eluded me. And then at once it came.

"Some thirty years or more before that noon
I was sub-captain of a company
Drawn from the legion of Calabria,
That marched up from Judæa north to Tyre.
We had pierced the old flat country of Jezreel,

The great Esdraelon Plain and fighting-
floor
Of Jew with Canaanite, and with the host
Of Pharaoh-Necho, king of Egypt, met
While crossing there to strike the Assyrian
pride.
We left behind Gilboa ; passed by Nain ;
Till bulging Tabor rose, embossed to the top
With arbute, terabinth, and locust growths.

"Encumbering me were sundry sick, so
fallen
Through drinking from a swamp beside the
way ;
But we pressed on, till, bearing over a ridge,
We dipt into a world of pleasantness—
A vale, the fairest I had gazed upon—
Which lapped a village on its furthest slopes
Called Nazareth, brimmed round by uplands
nigh.
In the midst thereof a fountain bubbled,
where,
Lime-dry from marching, our glad halt we
made
To rest our sick ones, and refresh us all.

"Here a day onward, towards the even-
tide,
Our men were piping to a Pyrrhic dance
Trod by their comrades, when the young
women came

To fill their pitchers, as their custom was.
I proffered help to one—a slim girl, coy
Even as a fawn, meek, and as innocent.
Her long blue gown, the string of silver coins
That hung down by her banded beautiful hair,
Symboled in full immaculate modesty.

"Well, I was young, and hot, and readily stirred
To quick desire. 'Twas tedious timing out
The convalescence of the soldiery;
And I beguiled the long and empty days
By blissful yieldance to her sweet allure,
Who had no arts, but what out-arted all,
The tremulous tender charm of trustfulness.
We met, and met, and under the winking stars
That passed which peoples earth—true union, yea,
To the pure eye of her simplicity.

"Meanwhile the sick found health; and we pricked on.
I made her no rash promise of return,
As some do use; I was sincere in that;
I said we sundered never to meet again—
And yet I spoke untruth unknowingly!—
For meet again we did. Now, guess you aught?

The weeping mother on Calvaria
Was she I had known—albeit that time and tears
Had wasted rudely her once flowerlike form,
And her soft eyes, now swollen with sorrowing.

"Though I betrayed some qualms, she marked me not;
And I was scarce of mood to comrade her
And close the silence of so wide a time
To claim a malefactor as my son—
(For so I guessed him). And inquiry made
Brought rumour how at Nazareth long before
An old man wedded her for pity's sake
On finding she had grown pregnant, none knew how,
Cared for her child, and loved her till he died.

"Well; there it ended; save that then I learnt
That he—the man whose ardent blood was mine—
Had waked sedition long among the Jews,
And hurled insulting parlance at their god,
Whose temple bulked upon the adjoining hill,
Vowing that he would raze it, that himself

Was god as great as he whom they adored,
And by descent, moreover, was their king ;
With sundry other incitements to misrule.

"The impalements done, and done the soldiers' game
Of raffling for the clothes, a legionary,
Longinus, pierced the young man with his lance
At signs from me, moved by his agonies
Through naysaying the drug they had offered him.
It brought the end. And when he had breathed his last
The woman went. I saw her never again . . . .
Now glares my moody meaning on you, friend?—
That when you talk of offspring as sheer joy
So trustingly, you blink contingencies.
Fors Fortuna! He who goes fathering
Gives frightful hostages to hazardry!"

Thus Panthera's tale. 'Twas one he seldom told,
But yet it got abroad. He would unfold,
At other times, a story of less gloom,
Though his was not a heart where jests had room.
He would regret discovery of the truth
Was made too late to influence to ruth
The Procurator who had condemned his son—

Or rather him so deemed. For there was none
To prove that Panthera erred not: and indeed,
When vagueness of identity I would plead,
Panther himself would sometimes own as much—
Yet lothly. But, assuming fact was such,
That the said woman did not recognize
Her lover's face, is matter for surprise.
However, there's his tale, fantasy or otherwise.

Thereafter shone not men of Panthera's kind:
The indolent heads at home were ill-inclined
To press campaigning that would hoist the star
Of their lieutenants valorous afar.
Jealousies kept him irked abroad, controlled
And stinted by an Empire no more bold.
Yet in some actions southward he had share—
In Mauretania and Numidia; there
With eagle eye, and sword and steed and spur,
Quelling uprisings promptly. Some small stir
In Parthia next engaged him, until maimed,
As I have said; and cynic Time proclaimed
His noble spirit broken. What a waste

Of such a Roman!—one in youth-time graced
With indescribable charm, so I have heard,
Yea, magnetism impossible to word
When faltering as I saw him. What a fame,
O Son of Saturn, had adorned his name,
Might the Three so have urged Thee!—Hour by hour
His own disorders hampered Panthera's power
To brood upon the fate of those he had known,
Even of that one he always called his own—
Either in morbid dream or memory . . . .
He died at no great age, untroublously,
An exit rare for ardent soldiers such as he.

THE UNBORN

I ROSE at night, and visited
The Cave of the Unborn :
And crowding shapes surrounded me
For tidings of the life to be,
Who long had prayed the silent Head
To haste its advent morn.

Their eyes were lit with artless trust,
Hope thrilled their every tone ;
" A scene the loveliest, is it not ?
A pure delight, a beauty-spot
Where all is gentle, true and just,
And darkness is unknown ? "

My heart was anguished for their sake,
I could not frame a word ;
And they descried my sunken face,
And seemed to read therein, and trace
The news that pity would not break,
Nor truth leave unaverred.

And as I silently retired
I turned and watched them still,
And they came helter-skelter out,
Driven forward like a rabble rout
Into the world they had so desired
By the all-immanent Will.

THE MAN HE KILLED

"Had he and I but met
By some old ancient inn,
We should have sat us down to wet
Right many a nipperkin!

"But ranged as infantry,
And staring face to face,
I shot at him as he at me,
And killed him in his place.

"I shot him dead because—
Because he was my foe,
Just so: my foe of course he was;
That's clear enough; although

"He thought he'd 'list, perhaps,
Off-hand like—just as I—
Was out of work—had sold his traps—
No other reason why

"Yes; quaint and curious war is!
You shoot a fellow down
You'd treat if met where any bar is,
Or help to half-a-crown."

1902.

GEOGRAPHICAL KNOWLEDGE

(A Memory of Christiana C——)

Where Blackmoor was, the road that led
To Bath, she could not show,
Nor point the sky that overspread
Towns ten miles off or so.

But that Calcutta stood this way,
Cape Horn there figured fell,
That here was Boston, here Bombay,
She could declare full well.

Less known to her the track athwart
Froom Mead or Yell'ham Wood
Than how to make some Austral port
In seas of surly mood.

She saw the glint of Guinea's shore
Behind the plum-tree nigh,
Heard old unruly Biscay's roar
In the weir's purl hard by. . . .

"My son's a sailor, and he knows
All seas and many lands,
And when he's home he points and shows
Each country where it stands.

"He's now just there—by Gib's high rock—
And when he gets, you see,
To Portsmouth here, behind the clock,
Then he'll come back to me!"

ONE RALPH BLOSSOM SOLILOQUIZES

("It being deposed that vij women who were mayds before he knew them have been brought upon the towne [rates ?] by the fornicacions of one Ralph Blossom, Mr Maior inquired why he should not contribute xiv pence weekly toward their mayntenance. But it being shewn that the sayd R. B. was dying of a purple feaver, no order was made."—*Budmouth Borough Minutes*: 16—.)

WHEN I am in hell or some such place,
A-groaning over my sorry case,
What will those seven women say to me
Who, when I coaxed them, answered "Aye"
to me?

"I did not understand your sign!"
Will be the words of Caroline;
While Jane will cry, "If I'd had proof of you,
I should have learnt to hold aloof of you!"

"I won't reproach: it was to be!"
Will dryly murmur Cicely;
And Rosa: "I feel no hostility,
For I must own I lent facility."

Lizzy says : "Sharp was my regret,
And sometimes it is now! But yet
I joy that, though it brought notoriousness,
I knew Love once and all its gloriousness!"

Says Patience : "Why are we apart?
Small harm did you, my poor Sweet Heart!
A manchild born, now tall and beautiful,
Was worth the ache of days undutiful."

And Anne cries : "O the time was fair,
So wherefore should you burn down there?
There is a deed under the sun, my Love,
And that was ours. What's done is done, my Love.
These trumpets here in Heaven are dumb to me
With you away. Dear, come, O come to me!"

THE NOBLE LADY'S TALE

(*circa* 1790)

I

"We moved with pensive paces,
I and he,
And bent our faded faces
Wistfully,
For something troubled him, and troubled me.

"The lanthorn feebly lightened
Our grey hall,
Where ancient brands had brightened
Hearth and wall,
And shapes long vanished whither vanish all.

"'O why, Love, nightly, daily,'
I had said,
'Dost sigh, and smile so palely,
As if shed
Were all Life's blossoms, all its dear things dead?'

"'Since silence sets thee grieving,'
He replied,
'And I abhor deceiving
One so tried,
Why, Love, I'll speak, ere time us twain divide.'

"He held me, I remember,
Just as when
Our life was June—(September
It was then);
And we walked on, until he spoke again.

"'Susie, an Irish mummer,
Loud-acclaimed
Through the gay London summer,
Was I; named
A master in my art, who would be famed.

"'But lo, there beamed before me
Lady Su;
God's altar-vow she swore me
When none knew,
And for her sake I bade the sock adieu.

"'My Lord your father's pardon
Thus I won:
He let his heart unharden
Towards his son,
And honourably condoned what we had done;

"'But said—recall you, dearest?—
As for Su,
I'd see her—ay, though nearest
Me unto—
Sooner entombed than in a stage purlieu!

"'Just so.—And here he housed us,
In this nook,
Where Love like balm has drowsed us:
Robin, rook,
Our chief familiars, next to string and book.

"'Our days here, peace-enshrouded,
Followed strange
The old stage-joyance, crowded,
Rich in range;
But never did my soul desire a change,

"'Till now, when far uncertain
Lips of yore
Call, call me to the curtain,
There once more,
But *once*, to tread the boards I trod before.

"'A night—the last and single
Ere I die—
To face the lights, to mingle
As did I
Once in the game, and rivet every eye!'

"Such was his wish. He feared it,
Feared it though
Rare memories so endeared it.
I, also,
Feared it still more; its outcome who could know?

"'Alas,' my Love, said I then,
'Since it be
A wish so mastering, why, then,
E'en go ye!—
Despite your pledge to father and to me . . .'

"'Twas fixed; no more was spoken
Thereupon;
Our silences were broken
Only on
The petty items of his needs while gone.

"Farewell he bade me, pleading
That it meant
So little, thus conceding
To his bent;
And then, as one constrained to go, he went.

"Thwart thoughts I let deride me,
As, 'twere vain
To hope him back beside me
Ever again:
Could one plunge make a waxing passion wane?

"I thought, 'Some wild stage-woman,
Honour-wrecked . . .'
But no: it was inhuman
To suspect;
Though little cheer could my lone heart
affect!

II

"Yet came it, to my gladness,
That, as vowed,
He did return.—But sadness
Swiftly cowed
The joy with which my greeting was endowed.

"Some woe was there. Estrangement
Marked his mind.
Each welcome-warm arrangement
I had designed
Touched him no more than deeds of careless
kind.

"'I—*failed*!' escaped him glumly.
'—I went on
In my old part. But dumbly—
Memory gone—
Advancing, I sank sick; my vision drawn

"'To something drear, distressing
As the knell
Of all hopes worth possessing!' . . .
—What befell
Seemed linked with me, but how I could not tell.

"Hours passed; till I implored him,
As he knew
How faith and frankness toward him
Ruled me through,
To say what ill I had done, and could undo.

"'*Faith—frankness.* Ah! Heaven save such!'
Murmured he,
'They are wedded wealth! *I* gave such
Liberally,
But you, Dear, not. For you suspected me.'

"I was about beseeching
In hurt haste
More meaning, when he, reaching
To my waist,
Led me to pace the hall as once we paced.

"'I never meant to draw you
To own all,'
Declared he. 'But—I *saw* you—
By the wall,
Half-hid. And that was why I failed withal!'

"'Where? when?' said I—'Why, nigh me,
At the play
That night. That you should spy me,
Doubt my fay,
And follow, furtive, took my heart away!'

"That I had never been there,
But had gone
To my locked room—unseen there,
Curtains drawn,
Long days abiding—told I, wonder-wan.

"'Nay, 'twas your form and vesture,
Cloak and gown,
Your hooded features—gesture
Half in frown,
That faced me, pale,' he urged, 'that night in town.

"'And when, outside, I handed
To her chair
(As courtesy demanded
Of me there)
The leading lady, you peeped from the stair.

"Straight pleaded I: 'Forsooth, Love,
Had I gone,
I must have been in truth, Love,
Mad to don
Such well-known raiment.' But he still went on

"That he was not mistaken
Nor misled.—
I felt like one forsaken,
Wished me dead,
That he could think thus of the wife he had wed!

"His going seemed to waste him
Like a curse,
To wreck what once had graced him;
And, averse
To my approach, he mused, and moped, and worse.

"Till, what no words effected
Thought achieved:
It was my wraith—projected,
He conceived,
Thither, by my tense brain at home aggrieved.

"Thereon his credence centred
Till he died;
And, no more tempted, entered
Sanctified,
The little vault with room for one beside."

III

Thus far the lady's story.—
Now she, too,
Reclines within that hoary
Last dark mew
In Mellstock Quire with him she loved so true.

A yellowing marble, placed there
Tablet-wise,
And two joined hearts enchased there
Meet the eyes;
And reading their twin names we moralize:

Did she, we wonder, follow
Jealously?
And were those protests hollow?—
Or saw he
Some semblant dame? Or can wraiths really be?

Were it she went, her honour,
All may hold,
Pressed truth at last upon her
Till she told—
(Him only—others as these lines unfold.)

Riddle death-sealed for ever,
Let it rest! . . .
One's heart could blame her never
If one guessed
That go she did. She knew her actor best.

UNREALIZED

Down comes the winter rain—
Spoils my hat and bow—
Runs into the poll of me ;
But mother won't know.

We've been out and caught a cold,
Knee-deep in snow ;
Such a lucky thing it is
That mother won't know !

Rosy lost herself last night—
Couldn't tell where to go.
Yes—it rather frightened her,
But mother didn't know.

Somebody made Willy drunk
At the Christmas show :
O 'twas fun ! It's well for him
That mother won't know !

Howsoever wild we are,
Late at school or slow,
Mother won't be cross with us,
Mother won't know.

How we cried the day she died!
Neighbours whispering low. . . .
But we now do what we will—
Mother won't know.

WAGTAIL AND BABY

A BABY watched a ford, whereto
A wagtail came for drinking ;
A blaring bull went wading through,
The wagtail showed no shrinking.

A stallion splashed his way across,
The birdie nearly sinking ;
He gave his plumes a twitch and toss,
And held his own unblinking.

Next saw the baby round the spot
A mongrel slowly slinking ;
The wagtail gazed, but faltered not
In dip and sip and prinking.

A perfect gentleman then neared ;
The wagtail, in a winking,
With terror rose and disappeared ;
The baby fell a-thinking.

ABERDEEN

(April: 1905)

"And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times."—Isaiah xxxiii. 6.

I LOOKED and thought, "All is too gray and cold
To wake my place-enthusiasms of old!"
Till a voice passed: "Behind that granite mien
Lurks the imposing beauty of a Queen."
I looked anew; and saw the radiant form
Of Her who soothes in stress, who steers in storm,
On the grave influence of whose eyes sublime
Men count for the stability of the time.

GEORGE MEREDITH

1828–1909

Forty years back, when much had place
That since has perished out of mind,
I heard that voice and saw that face.

He spoke as one afoot will wind
A morning horn ere men awake;
His note was trenchant, turning kind.

He was of those whose wit can shake
And riddle to the very core
The counterfeits that Time will break. . . .

Of late, when we two met once more,
The luminous countenance and rare
Shone just as forty years before.

So that, when now all tongues declare
His shape unseen by his green hill,
I scarce believe he sits not there.

No matter. Further and further still
Through the world's vaporous vitiate air
His words wing on—as live words will.

May, 1909.

YELL'HAM-WOOD'S STORY

Coomb-Firtrees say that Life is a moan,
And Clyffe-hill Clump says "Yea!"
But Yell'ham says a thing of its own:
It's not "Gray, gray
Is Life alway!"
That Yell'ham says,
Nor that Life is for ends unknown.

It says that Life would signify
A thwarted purposing:
That we come to live, and are called to die.
Yes, that's the thing
In fall, in spring,
That Yell'ham says:—
"Life offers—to deny!"

1902.

A YOUNG MAN'S EPIGRAM ON EXISTENCE

A SENSELESS school, where we must give
Our lives that we may learn to live!
A dolt is he who memorizes
Lessons that leave no time for prizes.

16 W. P. V., 1866.

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